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OR,
THE PIRATE NOBLE.

A Romance of Love and Hatred on
Sea and Shore.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE PLANTER-NOBLE.

MANY are the weird romances founded in reality on the Gulf of Mexico and its coasts, and no section of the "New World" is so full of legends, stories of buccaneers, and fatal feuds as the waters adjacent to Bienville, Pascagoula, Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian, where still dwell the descendants of French and Spanish exiles of noble blood, as well as those of sea rovers, red and white.

There are men along these shores, now bent with age, who knew Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf, and maybe served under his sable flag. What tales of the sea could they not tell if they would ere death seals their lips forever.

WITH A STARTLED CRY THE KIDNAPPED BOY SAW THE BLACK FLAG OF THE
PIRATE FLOATING.

It is of these shores and of the Gulf and boundless sea that I now write—a story of strange adventure, outlawry and retribution; and did I dare give names many there are who could vouch for it that this is not altogether a tale of fiction.

In a little cemetery on the shores of Mississippi Sound, back among the live oaks, whose branches are hung with festoons of Spanish moss, is the tomb of one whose life was a romance, a strange history of wrong, bitterness and retribution.

The moss has grown gray on his tomb, but the mystery of this man's life is not hidden by the grave, and with the author's prerogative I will give to my readers his quite remarkable story.

Built over and over again by several generations, no one would recognize now, in a handsome modern villa at Bay St. Louis, the one-time home of the Grayhursts.

There was a legend that the second son of Lord Grayhurst had been selected for the church, and, while studying at Trinity, had attended a theatrical performance, where the star was a beautiful young *debutante*.

He had loved her at sight, had given up the church, made her his wife and then came to America to make a home.

With the means at his command he had purchased a plantation on the Gulf shores, and erected the homestead referred to, naming it after his wife—Belle Eden.

The death of his father, then of his eldest brother, left him the heir to the English estates and title; but he resigned the lordly home and fortune into the keeping of an agent, and remained at Villa Eden, preferring to be an American planter to an English aristocrat.

Belle Eden, surrounded with its thousands of acres, bordering upon the shores of Bay St. Louis, over which it looked across the Sound into the Gulf beyond, with its negro village in the background and its vast cotton and grain fields, was an ideal home.

The house was built in exact imitation of the English manor of the Grayhursts, only upon a much reduced scale, and luxury and comfort ruled supreme.

Gaston Grayhurst, the master, was a splendid-looking, courtly gentleman, and his wife, once an actress, was his idol and the perfection of lovely womanhood.

There were plantation villas dotting the shore for miles, on either side of Belle Eden, but the latter was the grandest home of all and the representatives of old Spanish and French aristocrats who dwelt near, were always glad of an invitation to visit the Englishman's hospitable abode.

If Gaston Grayhurst had any regret for the past, he kept it to himself. His proud family had been shocked that he, as a student for Holy Orders, should marry an actress, and, could they have punished him by disinheriting them would have done so.

But Gaston had a handsome fortune all his own, and with it and his actress wife sought a home in the New World.

The remote possibility that he would ever become "Lord Grayhurst" was not taken into consideration by his father and eldest brother, then alive; so his existence was ignored, as thoroughly as was that of a younger brother who had run off when a mere lad and disgraced his name; as all said, by going to sea before the mast, since which time he had never been heard of.

But, Gaston Grayhurst had prospered well in America, so well that, when his father and elder brother died, and he became "my Lord Grayhurst," he shut up "The Meadows," as the English estate was called, and remained in the land of his adoption.

Two children were born to Gaston Grayhurst, a son, Gordon, and a daughter, Estelle.

At the time this story opens Gordon was a lad of ten, his little sister six years his junior. Both were handsome and intelligent, and the lad was noted as a most daring little sailor and orseman.

Not more than a mile from the home of the Grayhursts, near the shore, but upon a bluff and in the midst of a dense forest, was an old house that had a weird name among the coast dwellers.

It had been the house of an old Spanish noble, who, one night, had been there murdered together with his young wife and servants.

Not a soul knew who the murderers were, and the belief that buccaneers had committed the red deed was not proven, as there was no treasure taken, no silver plate was removed and the jewels worn by the young wife were not stolen.

It looked therefore as though an avenger had done the deed, landing by night from a vessel.

No one cared to dwell in the place after that and it was left to go to decay and become a place to be dreaded and avoided.

Boy, though he was but a lad, little Gordon Grayhurst had dared to venture where men feared to tread. He had gone there alone, on his pony, riding around the massive old mansion, though not entering it; and again, running up to the anchorage, in the cove under the cliff,

had landed accompanied only by a boy slave, a few years his senior.

One day little Gordon returned to make known that Castle Moro, as the old Spaniard had named his place, had a new master.

He had sailed down there, as had been his wont once a week, and had found an armed schooner in the cove at anchor. Boats were going to and from the shore with furniture and goods of various kinds; seeing which little Gordon had immediately put out of the cove, unseen by the busy crew, and making a landing down the shore had approached the house by land, concealed by the dense undergrowth surrounding the mansion.

He ascertained for a fact that Castle Moro had found a new master, and so told of his discovery.

In a few days Mr. Grayhurst had gone to call upon his new neighbor and welcome him to the country, he having learned that the estate had been purchased by a gentleman of wealth who had paid cash for the property.

Not a sign of improvement was there about the place that Mr. Grayhurst could see. The weeds grew just as thick, and excepting that a few of the windows were open and the front door ajar, it looked just as gloomy and desolate as before being occupied.

A loud rap with the brass knocker brought an aged butler, who looked surprised at seeing a visitor.

"I am Mr. Grayhurst, of Belle Eden, and have called to pay my respects to my new neighbor," said Mr. Grayhurst.

"My master, Monsieur Belgarde, is an invalid, sir, and desires to receive no visits from strangers. He came here to rest, perhaps to die, and will see no one, sir," and he bowed as though that settled the matter.

"If such be the man I am glad I did not meet the master," angrily muttered Mr. Grayhurst as he remounted his horse.

This was the treatment that other hospitable visitors received, and it was not long before Monsieur Belgarde was left severely alone, and no one went near the house any more than they had before it was occupied by its inhospitable master.

CHAPTER II.

THE WELL-LAID GHOST.

THE fact that the new owner of Castle Moro refused to receive the visits of any of his neighbors, but added to the curiosity of little Gordon Grayhurst regarding him and the old home.

The lad had listened to the tales of old sailors dwelling along the coast, about bold buccaneers and had heard the stories of the superstitious negroes about spooks and strange forms seen at night, until his brain was full of such things, and he was anxious to see for himself what others claimed to have seen.

He was utterly devoid of fear, in truth knew not the meaning of the word, and several times, when his parents believed him to be in bed had been out in a neighboring graveyard to try and get a look at a "ghost or spook."

With such an unbeliever of their tales, the negroes concluded that they must give their little master ocular demonstration of a ghost; but, as no ghost would walk to please their humor, a mulatto slave on the plantation of vicious nature decided to "play spook."

He made for himself a shroud, rubbed some punk over his face to give it a phosphorescent glow, and going by way of the garden stopped at the window of the lad's room.

Gordon had just retired, but he saw the white form and ghastly face at the window, sprung up, dressed and looked out to see it gliding away, beckoning to him to follow.

He slipped out into the hall, seized one of his father's pistols, leaped out of the window and followed.

The "ghost" led him directly toward the negro burying-ground, half a mile distant, in a magnolia forest hung with festoons of funereal-looking moss.

It was a desolate place by day, and by night was sepulchral in its gloom.

The boy followed the retreating form that continued to beckon him on; but the mulatto was not anxious to penetrate the depths of the gloomy magnolia grove by night, and seeing that Gordon was pursuing he came to a halt, irresolute.

Seeing that the lad did not halt, the mulatto waved his arms wildly, but Gordon did not pause, and the "spook" fearing the consequences to himself if discovered frightening the boy, determined to do his best to put the brave little fellow to flight.

Suddenly the shrouded form advanced, uttering wailing groans, but Gordon stood his ground and shouted:

"Stop, or I'll kill you over again!"

The ghost still advanced with waving arms and louder groans, when the lad, quickly leveling his pistol, fired.

A wild cry broke from the "ghost" and swaying a moment, it fell to the ground.

Then the fearless lad went back to the mansion, and entering the library where his mother and father sat together, called out:

"Father, I have killed a ghost over by the slave burying-ground. Come and see it!"

Very naturally Mr. Grayhurst and his wife were alarmed, and calling the house men-servants, they proceeded with lanterns to the scene to investigate.

There they found the ghost dead, and tearing off the shroud the evil face of the mulatto was revealed.

All the negroes understood it in an instant, and not one blamed the lad, while they were glad to have the place well rid of the vicious mulatto.

As for Gordon he was much affected when he saw the dead man lying at his feet, but he said:

"Father, he came to my window and beckoned to me and so I followed.

"When he came upon me groaning and waving his hands. I fired, and I am oh, so sorry!"

This made Gordon quite a hero in the neighborhood, where his courage was a subject of common remark.

When Mr. Grayhurst investigated the ghost affair it came out how many weird stories had been told to little Gordon, and he was exonerated from all blame.

The boy's disappointment was great to find that it had not been a real ghost, which he had longed to meet, and in those days superstition was too rampant among even the best classes and with intelligent people for them to assert that there were no such things as departed spirits coming back to roam the earth.

The result of the "ghost-hunt" of Gordon's was that Mr. Grayhurst kept a closer guard over his promising son's goings and comings; but in spite of all watchfulness the lad managed to pay a visit, one day, to the mysterious master of Castle Moro, and that visit proved to be the turning point in the strange life of Gordon Grayhurst.

CHAPTER III.

CASTLE MORO.

GORDON GRAYHURST did not lose his interest in Castle Moro on account of its having found an occupant.

The mysterious behavior of the new master interested him, and he was wont, when he could do so, to steal away from home and try and get a look at him.

One day he roamed down the coast in his little skiff, ran into the cove which was securely sheltered by forests on the shores surrounding it, and landing, was standing gazing at the gloomy mansion, when he was startled by a loud cry out upon the waters.

He turned quickly and saw that a sudden squall had swept over the Gulf, and a small boat, just entering the cove, had been capsized.

Gordon did not wait to see more, but ran to his skiff, sprung in, and pulled rapidly out to the boat that had gone over.

The seas, lashed into fury by the sudden squall, had snapped the mast in two, and the boat, filled with water, was driving out to sea before the tide and the winds.

It was hardly out of the cove, but should it reach the open water, then the doom of whoever was in it was sealed.

Gordon pulled with all his might, glanced over his shoulder as the skiff got further out from under the lee of the land and began to feel the full force of the waves, and saw that he was almost upon the capsized boat.

He saw a man clinging to it, and in another moment had run alongside, grasped the outstretched hand, and had saved the life of the one whom he had risked his own to save.

"My arm was rendered useless by the broken mast striking it, and but for you, my brave lad, I would have soon gone to the bottom. Who are you?"

So said the man, and as he sat in the stern while Gordon tugged hard at the oars to pull back, the lad saw that he was a man of thirty-three or four, with a handsome, strongly-marked face, darkly bronzed and with the look of a foreigner, though his English was perfect.

It was a face to admire and yet to dread, and the voice was rich in tone, yet had a certain ring in it that seemed insincere.

He was dressed in black, wore a diamond pin in his scarf and a superb ring upon the little finger of his left hand, while a watch-chain crossing his vest was of massive and unique manufacture.

"I am glad to have saved you, sir," the lad said modestly, and he colored under the gaze of the man, it was so earnest and searching.

"You are no fisher boy?" said the gentleman.

"Oh, no, sir; I am a planter's son."

"Your name?"

"Gordon Grayhurst, sir."

"Great God!"

The words came through the shut teeth of the man, and his face paled more than it had in the presence of death a moment before.

"Does your arm hurt, sir?" asked Gordon, fairly startled by the sudden exclamation.

"No! It is nothing— But, yes, it does pain me."

"So you are the son of Gaston Grayhurst, of Belle Eden?"

And the boy was too young to detect that there was something behind the words.

"Yes, sir."

"Your father called upon me, boy, but I did not see him, and in fact see no one."

"I did not come here to make new acquaintances, but simply to pass my time in my own way."

"But I owe you my life, and I want you to come and see me."

"Mind you, that does not mean your father, nor any one else, but simply yourself, and you can come once a week to see me, and I'll show you the grand old rookery I live in."

"There, land me just here, and don't forget to come and see me."

"Good-by, Gordon Grayhurst."

He stepped out on the little dock as he spoke, grasped the lad's hand and walked away.

For some reason Gordon felt hurt, and yet he knew not just why.

He did not like his new friend, and yet saw no reason why he should not do so.

So he pulled homeward, and going up to the mansion, told his father and mother what had happened, yet held back what had looked to him like a sneer when the master of Castle Moro had spoken of his parents.

Both Gordon Grayhurst and his wife praised their brave son for his gallant act, and the father said proudly:

"Some day, Gordon, you will make a noble man, and I wish you, when you are twelve years of age, to enter the American Navy as a middy, for there a field of honor and distinction will be open to you for the future."

Gordon felt proud of the praise of his parents, and said:

"The gentleman asked me to come and see him one day each week, father."

"I will go with you, my son, the first time, for though he refused to see me once, he surely will not do so now, after you have saved his life."

Gordon looked confused and then said:

"Father, he told me that he wished to see no one else, only me."

"He is indeed a strange man; but I will not call, and, my son, I do not care to have you go too often, as I know nothing of this mysterious master of Castle Moro."

"Doubtless some invalid, soured with the world, who prefers to be left entirely alone," said Mrs. Grayhurst, and the subject was dropped between them, though Gordon had determined to visit the strange master of Castle Moro and get a glimpse of the mysterious old house whose history had been such a sad one.

Some days after the lad made his visit.

He found the stranger leaning upon the gate, gazing seaward through a glass, and he greeted his young visitor cordially and said:

"I am glad you have come, Gordon."

"My arm, you see, is still lame, but I am all right."

"Come into the house with me."

This was just what Gordon wished.

At last his curiosity was to be satisfied about the old house.

He accompanied the host to the house, the door, barred and locked, was opened by the butler, when his master had knocked in a peculiar way, and the lad found himself within the mansion he had so longed to cross the threshold of.

The library was a grand room, with innumerable books scattered about, and a dining-room was near, and at lunch, for he was urged to stay, Gordon saw more silver service than even Belle Eden could boast of.

The butler seemed to understand the needs of a boy, and heaped his plate with edibles of the most tempting kind.

Having eaten heartily, Gordon was shown over the old mansion by his host, who told him strange legends he had heard of the structure.

There were innumerable vacant rooms, the furniture going to decay in them, and there were long corridors and nooks here and there, which Gordon's imagination peopled with spooks and ghosts.

But he noticed that the library, dining-room and sleeping apartments of the host by no means had a spooky appearance, for they were all most luxurious in appointments.

Delighted with his visit, after a couple of hours' stay, the lad took his departure, urged to come again, and that night his mother and father listened to his story with deepest interest.

The strange man had evidently taken a deep interest in the bright boy who had saved his life.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS VESSEL.

A FEW nights after the visit of Gordon to Castle Moro, a vessel, under reefed canvas, for a gale was blowing, ran into the little cove near Monsieur Belgarde's house, and dropped anchor.

Had it been daylight the vessel would have been seen to be a schooner of some two hundred tons burden, built as trim as a yacht, and with a battery large enough for a craft double her tonnage.

It would also have been discovered that she carried a very large crew, and looked just the vessel to give a good account of herself in a combat.

She had a skillful pilot at her wheel, for she dashed along at a splendid pace, though heading directly in for the dark shores.

It may be thought that two lights ashore were her guide, a beacon to show the man at the wheel just how to head for a safe anchorage.

One of these lights evidently came from the window of a house ashore, for it was large and square.

The other light was a small one, blood-red, and looked to be in the cupola of a mansion.

And such was the case, for the first-named shone from the library window in Castle Moro, and the last was in the cupola of that old residence, and could only be seen from a certain point out upon the waters.

The helmsman of the schooner kept these two lights in his eye constantly, and so, confident that all was right held on swiftly to his course.

He soon passed in between the wooded arms that sheltered the cove in front of Castle Moro, and getting to a safe anchorage quickly shortened sail and dropped anchor.

A boat was lowered, and a man in a cloak came from the cabin and entering it was rowed ashore.

He stepped out upon the pier, gave a low order to his boat's crew and walked slowly toward the mansion.

The red light was visible in the cupola, and from the window of the library shone a bright glare out upon the trees.

Up the weed-grown walk he pursued his way, his cloak drawn closely around him to protect himself from the fierce blasts, and ascending the broad steps knocked three times slowly with the heavy knocker.

Then was heard within the sound of a bar being removed and a bolt drawn, and the door opened.

The old butler stood there, and a swinging lamp burned in the hallway.

"Ah, senor! the master will be glad to see you," said the butler, and with a nod of greeting the visitor, as though familiar with the mansion strode toward a door on the right.

He gave three quick knocks and entered without seeming to wait for a response.

Within the room sat the master of Moro Castle.

He was at his table, and over him hung a light that enabled him to read or write as the humor took him.

At one of the windows, the blinds of the upper part was open, and the swinging lamp was so hung as to cast its glare out over the waters, and this had been one of the beacons that guided the vessel in, along with the red light in the cupola.

From without the lower blinds were closed and no one could have glanced into the windows without using a ladder.

This may have been accident, but it looked like design.

The master of Castle Moro glanced up at the entrance of his visitor and his face brightened, while he said quickly:

"Why, Bestor! you are ahead of time: but very welcome."

"I had to run in, captain, to avoid a vessel-of-war, and concluded to come to see you, and know if you had any orders," was the reply of the visitor, who cast aside his cloak and took the seat to which Monsieur Belgarde motioned him.

"I am glad you came, for I have work for you," and the speaker's manner was thoughtful, as though he was thinking of something else than his words.

"What! Can I congratulate you upon having found the—"

"No! no! no! Not that yet, but I will find it."

"But a strange fatality led me to this place, Bestor."

"Indeed, sir, then you have stronger hopes of finding the—"

"It is not that I refer to, for I have found something of greater value to me, I assure you, and you must help me to carry out my plans."

"Of course, captain."

"You mean Monsieur Belgarde, Bestor?"

"True, sir, I forgot we are not on board ship; but what shall I do, sir?"

"Your vessel is in the cove?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, run out to-night, make for an anchorage in Bay St. Louis and remain there until you hear from me."

"Yes, Monsieur Belgarde."

"You must fly the American flag of course, and if any one comes off to you, your vessel, remember, is a United States cruiser."

"I understand, sir."

"Anchor so as not to be seen by any passing cruiser in the Gulf, bound along the coast, and you may have to remain for some days."

"All right, sir, I am under your orders."

"Now we will have supper, and then you had best run out, to be at your anchorage when day breaks."

The master of Castle Moro then led his visitor

into the dining-room, and the two enjoyed a tempting supper, washed down by several bottles of rare old wine.

Then the man known as Bestor took his leave, again enveloping himself in his cloak, thus concealing the somewhat gorgeous uniform he wore.

Monsieur Belgarde also threw a cloak over his shoulders and ventured out into the inclement night, which would have surprised his neighbors who regarded him as an invalid.

The schooner got under way, as soon as Bestor returned on board, and standing out of the cove headed up toward the head of the Bay St. Louis.

The lights of the houses of the planters along the shores of the bay, served as a guide for the officer in command of the fleet vessel, for she fairly flew over the rough waters, and at last, after having turned his glass for some time on a certain point, an order was given to run up into the wind and drop anchor.

When the dwellers along the shore awoke the next morning, they were surprised to see an armed schooner lying a mile from the land, and flying from her peak the Stars and Stripes.

And there was no one that was more delighted with the presence of the vessel there than was Gordon Grayhurst, who made up his mind that he would have a closer look at the beautiful craft than could be gained from the shore.

Whether his father read the boy's thoughts or not, he turned to him, as the two stood on the piazza together and said:

"My son, if it were not for the yellow flag flying yonder on the cruiser, I would go out and invite the officers to visit Belle Eden; but that means that we must keep off, as there is a contagious disease on board, so we cannot go near her."

Gordon was disappointed, and that day, to make up for the disappointment, he went to see his new-found friend the master of Castle Moro.

CHAPTER V.

THE KIDNAPPER.

It was late when Gordon ran his skiff ashore at Castle Moro, and he felt that he would have but a short visit to his new friend, Monsieur Belgarde.

That gentleman was seated upon his piazza as the boy approached and greeted him cordially, telling him to be seated and asking about the health of his parents.

"There's a vessel of war up the bay, sir," said Gordon, anxious to break the news at once.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What flag does she fly, my son?"

"The United States', sir, and I wanted to go on board, for I do love war-ships; but father says she has out a signal, a yellow flag, which means there is sickness on board, so I can't go out to her."

"What is the vessel?"

"A schooner, sir, and so beautiful."

"You are a born sailor, Gordon, and should be encouraged; but have you ever seen the craft before?"

"I think so, Monsieur Belgarde."

"When and where?"

"The night of your coming I saw a vessel like her anchored in your cove."

"Ah! that was the craft that I came in, and which brought my furniture."

"She looked very much like the schooner now up the bay."

"Indeed! well, she may be the vessel of my friend Captain Bestor, who kindly brought me here, and I will ask you to take a letter to him on your way home."

"But the fever, sir."

"Oh, that you need not fear, as you will simply board for an instant."

"My father might not wish it, sir, for fear we might all catch the fever."

"I will guarantee that there will be no danger."

"Are your parents at home this afternoon?"

"No, sir, they drove to the other plantation, but I wanted to come here to see you."

"They will hardly return before dark?"

"No, sir, for it is quite a distance to the plantation."

"Well, you run out to the schooner after dark, on your way home, and carry my letter to the captain."

"But it might not be the one you think, sir."

"In that case do not leave it, but see, I believe we are to have a storm to-night, so you had better start home, or it will be dark before you can reach there, as you have to go by the schooner."

"I will write the letter at once."

Entering the library Monsieur Belgarde hastily wrote a few lines, sealed the letter and gave it to Gordon, whom he accompanied down to the shore where his boat awaited him.

The sun had set, and there were waves of storm-clouds rising from the north that betokened a blow before very long.

But Gordon was neither afraid of darkness or a storm, and setting his little leg-of-mutton sail he went skimming away over the waters at a good speed.

Once out of the cove he shaped his course for

the schooner, dimly seen in the distance, and which was at anchor just a mile off Belle Eden Plantation.

The lights of the schooner were soon set, and gave the boy a beacon to steer by, and he could see that the mansion was also lighted up and wondered if his parents had returned.

His father had not told him he should not go on board the schooner, but he felt that he had not wished him to do so.

Still, to only carry a letter by for Monsieur Belgarde, Gordon felt his father would not object to.

The schooner soon loomed up ahead close at hand, and the storm-clouds were rising fast, but Gordon was sure he had ample time to reach home before the gale crept over the waters.

A few moments after and a stern hail rung out over the sea:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" came in the shrill tones of the boy.

"What boat is that?"

"A plantation skiff, and I wish to know if Captain Bestor commands that schooner?"

"Lieutenant Bestor does, at your service, my lad, for such your voice proves you to be."

"Come alongside."

The latter voice was not the one that had hailed, and the boy ran up to the side of the schooner.

"I have a letter, sir, from Monsieur Belgarde, sir."

"Ah! come on board and deliver it, my little man."

"My father would not like it, sir, for he saw your fever flag flying."

"Ah, yes, that was merely to keep visitors away; but there is no illness on board, and you are welcome."

Gordon was delighted at the chance to board the vessel-of-war, and surely there could be no harm when invited by her commander, who had said there was no sickness on board.

He forgot all about the rising storm, and sprung on board the schooner at the invitation with an alacrity that showed his pleasure in being allowed to do so.

"Well, sir, you are a young messenger, indeed, to send out in the face of a blow and by night with a letter," said the officer, who met him at the gangway and led him back toward the quarter-deck.

Gordon saw the battle-lanterns, their weird glare lighting up the scene, the trim rigging, neat decks and scores of men, with the cutlasses encircling the masts, the great guns, and he was quite bewildered.

The officer led him at once to the cabin, bade him be seated, and broke the seal of the letter handed to him by Gordon.

He eyed the boy curiously as he did so, and the lad gazed at him as though he deemed him, the commander of a vessel-of-war, the greatest of great men.

The officer was the same who had visited Monsieur Belgarde at Castle Moro, and he read his letter through slowly.

Then he said:

"You are the youth who saved the life of Monsieur Belgarde?"

"Yes, sir," answered Gordon, delighted that the great commander of a vessel-of-war should know of his deed.

"You are a brave lad, and must be my guest to-night on board."

"But my parents will be most anxious, sir, and—"

"I will send a boat ashore with word to them that I keep you with me."

"Wait for me here."

Gordon could hardly believe his senses.

He had not expected such an honor, for the few vessels-of-war that had visited that coast he had had but a very cursory glance of, and the officers, though several times guests at Belle Eden, had scarcely noticed him.

Now he was to be the guest of a naval commander.

Turning as he reached the companionway, Lieutenant Bestor asked:

"Where do you live, my lad?"

"At Belle Eden, sir, just opposite to the schooner."

"Ah! That elegant place is your home, then?"

"Yes, sir."

The officer went on deck and cast a quick glance about him.

The storm was rising rapidly, and would break within half an hour.

"Conrado, take a boat ashore, with that lad's skiff in tow."

"When near the breakers, capsize it, and see that it goes ashore along with the oars, and the mast you must break loose from the step."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Here is the boy's cap, which you can wet thoroughly and throw out upon the beach, as though dashed there by the waves."

"I understand, sir."

"And hasten back, for you must not let that storm catch you, as we sail when the worst of it has blown over."

The one addressed was an under officer, and saluting politely he at once proceeded to obey

the commands, while Lieutenant Bestor returned to the cabin.

In the delight, at gazing about him, Gordon had not seen the officer take his cap, and he was looking with admiration at the beautiful cabin that looked so warlike, when Bestor returned.

"I sent a boat ashore, my lad, so you can make yourself at home here, and after supper can retire to a state-room I will give you to sleep in," said the officer, and, an hour after, Gordon sunk to sleep with the winds howling overhead, the waves dashing against the schooner causing her to rock heavily, and dreams of future fame as a sailor came to him.

It was daylight before he awoke, and hastily dressing he went on deck.

To his amazement the boy saw that the schooner was scudding along over a rough sea and no land was in sight.

He had been kidnapped.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FALSE TELL-TALES ON THE SHORE.

JUST in time to escape the storm the Belle Eden carriage rolled up to the door of the mansion, and Gaston Grayhurst sprung out and aided his wife and little daughter to alight.

The house looked most cheerful, as they entered the brightly lighted hallway, and while Mrs. Grayhurst sought her room the planter entered the library.

At once he missed his son, who generally at that hour, was engaged in looking over some books of adventure that suited his ardent fancy, and of which he seemed never to tire.

"Where is Master Gordon?" he asked, of a servant, who came at his call.

"He went to Castle Moro, sah, and hab not returned, master," replied the negro.

Mr. Grayhurst's face paled at this.

The storm had not yet broken, but its approaching roar was heard.

He threw on his storm-coat and went out upon the piazza.

Then he walked rapidly down to the shore and saw that his son's skiff was not at the pier.

He glanced over the dark waters and saw no sail.

The schooner lay at anchor off-shore, and a flash of lightning showed that she was stripped to meet the gale, having both anchors out and with her topmasts housed.

Then the planter hastened back to the mansion, just as the storm broke in fury.

"My God! can he be out on such a night?" he groaned, as he, sheltered by the piazza, stood gazing at the tempest.

"No, no, that man would never have allowed him to depart in the face of the storm."

"He has kept him all night, but he should have sent me word."

"Perhaps Gordon started in time, and ran his boat to the shore when he thought the storm would catch him."

"I must keep a brighter eye on him, for he is the most adventurous youngster I ever knew."

Just then a form glided up to him, and an anxious voice said:

"Gaston, is he out upon such a night?"

It was Mrs. Grayhurst, and her face and voice were full of anxiety, as she joined her husband.

"I think that Monsieur Belgarde has kept him all night, and you know he has but little help with him at the place, so could not send us word," he said, cheerily.

But the mind of the mother was not eased by this, and she said:

"One of the men must at once ride over to Castle Moro to find out."

"I will send Sam, though it is a bad night to have him exposed to."

"Our boy, a mere child, may be battling for his life now against the storm," she said, almost fiercely, and Gaston Grayhurst hastened into the mansion, while she, refusing to go in, stood gazing out over the storm-swept waters.

"Sam will go at once, and he seemed anxious to do so," said the planter, as he returned to the piazza.

"God grant it be as you think, Gaston."

"Amen!" he said, with a solemnity of tone that showed he feared the worst in spite of his hopeful words to his wife.

A few moments after a horseman dashed by like the wind.

It was Sam, going on his errand through the darkness and storm.

"Bring us good news, Sam," cried the anxious woman, but her voice was blown back into her teeth.

The clatter of hoofs died away soon, and the roar of the winds and waters alone were heard.

The thunder then pealed like a sea combat, and vivid forks of lightning shot across the inky skies.

Now and then the schooner was revealed still at anchor, and pitching wildly, and the call to supper was unheeded by the anxious parents.

"Give Estelle her supper and put her to bed," said Mrs. Grayhurst, to the girl who came to call them.

"Yes, missus; but, hain't yer heerd nothin' o' poor Marse Gordon?" asked the negress.

"No, Elsie; but do not let Estelle know, or she will fret for her brother."

The negress re-entered the house and the father and mother stood on watch.

The time dragged slowly along, but Sam did not return, and he seemed to them to have been gone hours, until the planter looked at his watch and saw that but half an hour had passed since his departure.

At last the clatter of hoofs was heard in a lull of the storm, and Mrs. Grayhurst leant so heavily upon her husband he feared she would faint, and passed his arm about her.

"He is coming."

"Yes, Belle, but be brave and hope for the best."

"I cannot—I dread the worst," said the woman hoarsely.

Nearer and nearer came the clatter of hoofs and soon Sam dashed up, threw himself from his horse, which ran on to the stables alone, and the faithful negro fairly groaned forth:

"Massa, he done left dere afore de storm, sah."

"In his boat?" asked the planter, while his wife's head drooped heavily upon his shoulder.

"Yas, sah, in his skiff."

"How long before the storm?"

"An hour, sah."

"Who did you see?"

"De gemman, sah."

"You saw Monsieur Belgarde?"

"Yes, sah, for he come out when he hear me talkin' to his butler man, and he seem so anxious he were quite upset."

"What did he say?"

"He say as how he wanted young massa ter stay all night, and he would send word over here, sah; but Marse Gordon he say could make de run easy, and ef he were catched he c'u'd go on board de skunner-o'-war dat lay right in his way, and so he set out all right."

"Do you hear, wife, he may have sought refuge on the schooner, which as you know lies in his course from Castle Moro, and Gordon would be only too glad of such a chance to board her."

"God grant it that he has; but I have no hope."

"Do not give up, Belle, but hope for the best, and as soon as we dare launch a boat I will take my crew and run out to the schooner."

"Yes, that is it, wife, Gordon is safe on board the vessel-of-war."

"De skunner am gone, massa!" almost shrieked Sam, as a flash of lightning revealed that the vessel was not where she had been last seen.

All eyes were now sweeping the black waters, and breathlessly they waited for another flash of lightning.

It seemed an age in coming, but at last the whole sea was illuminated like noonday, and the schooner was seen driving along under storm-sails out toward the Gulf.

"She doubtless dragged her anchors in the sandy bottom, so got under way to run before the gale."

"It is dying out rapidly, so she will be at her anchorage in the morning and we will then see our boy."

So said the planter and he hoped it would be so.

But the mother held no hope; she already felt that there was a grave in her heart, the grave of her noble boy, and she was led into the library moaning with grief.

Neither father or mother closed their eyes that night, and the negroes sat about with sad faces and talking in whispers, for all dearly loved the daring, handsome young master.

The morning broke brightly and there upon the shore was a broken skiff, the oars, sail and cap to tell the sad tale.

They served their false duty well, for they led all to believe that the brave boy had been overtaken by the storm, his boat wrecked and his life lost, and a gloom fell upon all who recalled the bright promise his boyhood had given for a brilliant future.

CHAPTER VII.

DESTINED FOR EVIL.

IT was several weeks after the storm, and the supposed death of little Gordon Grayhurst, and the gloom of grief still rested upon the community, for every sympathy was felt for the sorrowing parents of the noble boy.

Far and wide the beach had been searched for the body, and small sailing craft had cruised about in the hope of picking it up; but all believed that the storm had swept it out into the Gulf to be seen no more, and the planter had already designed a marble tribute to be erected to his memory in the burying-ground set apart for his family.

It was a marble slab on which were carved a shattered boat, a broken mast and torn sail, a pair of oars and a boy's cap, sad relics of that fearful night, appearing as cast up upon the sandy beach by the waves.

From Castle Moro had come a letter, written in French and in a hand strangely feminine for a man, that read:

"My heartfelt sympathies to Monsieur and Madam Grayhurst in their deep affliction, for the loss of their brave boy cuts deep into the heart of one who owes to him his life, yet loved him as though he were his own flesh and blood."

"PERR DELCARLE."

Such was the note left at Belle Eden one morning by the aged butler of Castle Moro, and the planter said:

"Say to Monsieur Belgarde that I appreciate his sympathy, as will also my wife, and I shall answer his kind communication in person."

"Pardon, monsieur, but it will be of no use, for my master will see no one, your son being the only exception."

"I will at least make the attempt," said Gaston Grayhurst, coldly.

"Monsieur will not waste his time, and he will pardon me for saying so; but I know my master," was the response, and the butler turned away.

In spite of this bold assertion, Gaston Grayhurst, one day when his wife was well enough to have him leave her, rode over to Castle Moro.

He dismounted, ascended the broad steps and knocked loudly.

But to his knock no response was returned, and chagrined at such treatment, he remounted his horse and rode homeward, convinced that the old butler was right, for he did not doubt but that his visit was known.

It was just sunset when he rode out of the gate and turned into the shore road, and he saw far in the offing a sail.

It was a schooner, and her trim appearance at that distance showed him that she must be a vessel-of-war.

He was a good sailor, had an eye for the nautical, and after a close glance came to the conclusion that it was the very schooner that had been anchored off Belle Eden the night that Gordon was lost.

"Oh, that it could be possible my poor boy had taken refuge on her!"

"She is heading up toward the bay, but with this light breeze, can hardly arrive until after midnight."

"But I will board her the first thing in the morning, and a new hope is in my heart that my boy may be on that vessel."

"Yet I dare not build up such hope in his mother's bosom, so will abide the morrow."

And he rode slowly on homeward, ever and anon turning his eyes wistfully upon the distant vessel which, under full sail, was standing toward the Bay St. Louis, as though to find an anchorage there.

The craft seen by Mr. Grayhurst was indeed the one that had been in the bay the night of Gordon's disappearance, and it came on with speed, considering the light breeze that was blowing, and soon after ten o'clock glided into the cove at Castle Moro.

The anchor was noiselessly let fall, and a boat was lowered and held at the gangway until an officer came from the cabin and entered it.

Then he was rowed shoreward, and landing, made his way up to the mansion, where the red light in the cupola and the glare from the library window shone as brightly as before.

In fact it seemed to be a hobby of the mysterious owner of the old place to keep those lights lit from sunset to sunrise, although they could only be seen from a certain point out upon the waters.

A knock at the door, the same peculiar knock which had before been given, brought the old butler in response, and the visitor was at once admitted into the library.

There sat the owner of Castle Moro as before, and he greeted his visitor with:

"I was beginning to be anxious about you, Bestor; but you are all right, I see."

"Yes, captain—I mean Monsieur Belgarde—I kept away on purpose, as I feared there might be trouble following the kidnapping affair."

"Not a bit of it, as you managed it so well, for there is not a soul but believes the boy dead."

"It certainly had that look, sir, from all appearances."

"Well, Bestor, how is he?"

"He does not yet know that our vessel is not an American cruiser."

"Indeed?"

"I told him that we had to put to sea that night, on account of the storm, and as we have found no prizes since, he thinks we have merely been on a cruise, and that to-morrow he will return home."

"I see; but he will not."

"You intend to keep him, then, sir?"

"Of course I do."

"He is a bright lad, daring as any one I ever saw, and goes to the top without a shadow of fear."

"Then he has been studying every rope and spar on board ship."

"Well, that is just what I wish him to do, Bestor, as he will have to become a sailor."

"Not such as—as we are, sir?"

"Of course, what else?"

"It seems sad, sir, to destroy that boy's life, and he talks so sweetly of his parents and little sister."

"Lieutenant Bestor, you must not allow sentiment to govern you, for I have revenge to gratify and much to gain, through that boy."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, but what it is, you need know nothing about, but I shall raise the boy on the deck of that schooner, and I shall begin at once, for I go to sea to-night, as what I came here for has not yet been discovered, and there must be prizes taken to keep the men in good-humor."

"Then I can return here while you take a run to the African coast for a cargo."

"And the boy is to go with me, sir?"

"Yes, and he is to be taught to forget his parents, his sister and his home."

"All past scenes must be obliterated from his mind and he must know only that schooner, her officers and crew."

"Do you understand, Bestor?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Then I rely upon you to help me train this boy up as I have said."

"It will break his heart, I fear."

"Bab! he is hardly eleven years of age, I believe, and in the present will soon forget the past."

"Will he not recognize you, sir, when he sees you to-morrow, and this very thing turn him against you?"

"No, for what man of my crew knows me in the two parts I play?"

"You alone know me as Monsieur Belgarde—and as I am aboard ship."

"The boy, keen-eyed as he is, will never suspect it."

"Well, now to supper and then to go on board the Idle Wings and hunt for gold."

An hour after the schooner sailed out of the cove, and her commander, known ashore as the mysterious master of Castle Moro, and afloat as Captain Pierre, was in command, Lieutenant Bestor dropping back without a word to second in rank of the strange craft which had taken Gordon Grayhurst from his happy home to lead a life, the strangeness of which forms the plot of this story, which is not so wholly a work of romantic fiction as the reader may imagine.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COMBAT AS SEEN FROM BELOW DECKS.

GORDON awoke the next morning with the expectation of seeing the schooner anchored off his home, and of soon being with his father, mother and little Estelle once more.

He had enjoyed his cruise immensely, but his expectations and imaginings of what a vessel-of-war really was had had a set-back.

The men were a wilder-looking lot than he thought cruisers carried, and there was a rough discipline on board that was somewhat startling to one of his years.

He had been the guest of the officer in command, whom he had believed to be captain, and he had not found on board the number of trim little middies he had supposed were absolutely necessary to make up a ship-of-war's crew.

The two officers besides Bestor were hard-looking characters, and they cursed the men with every order.

Bestor appeared to be a gentleman throughout.

He was of gentle mien, a handsome fellow of thirty, and though he did not swear about the ship, the men obeyed his orders with a promptness they did not show to the commands of the others.

Then Gordon took it into his young head that the other officers did not like Bestor.

To him the lieutenant had been all kindness, and the kidnapped boy had taken a great fancy to the officer.

As he awoke the next morning he felt that the schooner was careened well over and sailing rapidly, and not at anchor as he had expected she would be off Belle Eden Plantation.

He heard the sound of quick steps on deck, then a loud command followed by the words:

"Now cut her masts away with that shot-fire!"

The deep boom of a heavy gun, almost over his head, with the recoil of the piece, brought him out of his berth with a bound.

It was the first time he had heard a heavy gun fired, and he promptly decided that it surpassed thunder.

To tell the truth, Gordon was flurried.

He had faced a "ghost" and deadly peril with a nerve a man might have envied, but here was a new experience for him.

He was on a vessel-of-war, a heavy gun was firing at a foe, that was evident, and the schooner was fairly flying through the waters.

Of course she was in chase of an enemy, he thought.

But a second shot from the heavy gun told him that she would not be firing the stern pivot if the foe was ahead.

Then came one, two, three guns in rapid succession, and from a distance, and a crashing, grinding sound showed him that one shot had struck the schooner and torn through her cabin.

Never in his life before had Gordon found such difficulty in making his toilet.

He could not find his clothes, and when he did so, he could hardly get into them.

Then his shoes were hard to tie, and he did not wish to be suspected of fear by going on deck in a half-dressed condition.

At last he managed to finish his toilet, even to brushing his hair, and by this time the stern

gun of the schooner was thundering forth rapid discharges, orders were heard mingled with oaths, and from astern came a constant and heavy fire from some dangerous foe.

There were groans heard on deck, with a stern order, as Gordon reached the cabin, and given in a ringing voice:

"Throw those dead men into the sea, for they incumber the decks!"

Gordon glanced from the stern ports, for he had entered the cabin of the schooner, and as he did so a human form came flying by and fell into the sea, followed by another.

The face was torn to pieces he saw, and he shuddered at the sight.

A strange fascination kept his eyes upon the foaming wake of the schooner, and he beheld one after another, until six had fallen, human beings dashed over astern from the deck.

And meanwhile the gun overhead roared, and other guns in the distance were heard.

Then came a flying form, and it was torn and blood-stained, while from the lips of the man broke a cry that long echoed in the ears of the appalled boy.

The man was not dead, but had been mercifully tossed into the sea.

A cry broke from Gordon's lips, and he gazed spellbound upon the sight.

He had watched the other forms dance a moment in the snowy wake of the schooner and then sink from sight.

But this one struggled, struck out to save life, and from his lips came cries for help, while the crested waves were crimsoned with his blood.

Gordon felt that he must save him.

He would dash upon deck and tell Captain Bestor that the man was not dead, that he must put about and save him.

Surely those on deck could not know that the man was alive.

But as he looked, his eyes for the first time fell upon a vessel astern.

It was a sloop-of-war, more than double the size of the schooner, and she was under clouds of canvas pressing on in chase.

From her bow-ports, and from a pivot-gun broke puffs of smoke, deep booms followed and then came the roaring of the iron shots through the air.

Gordon heard the crashing of timbers as one iron messenger struck the schooner, and he heard shrieks of agony, groans, prayers and curses commingled as another shot tore through a mass of humanity.

But he must not forget that struggling man astern, fighting for life in the wake of the schooner.

He would save him at least he thought, for he forgot that to save him would be to sacrifice the lives of all others.

Out of the cabin he bounded, up the companionway, and all were startled as they heard the kidnapped boy's shrill voice pipe:

"You threw a live man into the sea, and you must save him!"

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE BLACK FLAG.

WHEN Gordon Grayhurst gave utterance to the words that close the last chapter, he stopped suddenly and his gaze was riveted upon a man who suddenly confronted him.

That man was tall, well-formed and was attired in a gorgeous uniform.

He wore a sword the hilt of which glittered with precious stones, and in his belt of gold were thrust two pistols.

The face of the man was stern, his eyes fairly blazing with anger and hatred, and yet he was perfectly calm.

The deck was red with human blood, and the crew were blackened with powder, stripped to their waists and were fiercely fighting the stern pivot-gun.

There were several dead men lying about, and wounded men were being carried forward.

Standing near the bulwarks, a glass in hand, and perfectly cool was Lieutenant Bestor.

But a glance was sufficient to show Gordon, boy though he was, that he was not commander there.

The strange fierce-faced man was the chief on deck, and he it was who now bent his eyes upon the boy.

Then came the stern command:

"Silence, boy! and go below!"

There was something about the man that was familiar to the boy, but he could not recall him.

But he answered promptly:

"I am no coward to be sent below, sir."

"I do not fear if I am a boy!"

A cheer broke from the men at his brave words, and the chief said hoarsely:

"Then remain on deck and take your chances with the rest of us; but mind you, no meddling."

"But the wounded man, sir, who I fear has sunk?"

"Would you save a dying man at the risk of the lives of us all, you young fool?"

"Now hold your tongue!"

The order was in a tone that Gordon dared not disobey, and he glanced at Lieutenant Bestor.

That officer gave him a look of warning and nodded for him to approach.

Instantly he did so, and the officer said:

"I am not commander now, Gordon, for our chief came on board last night, so be careful not to anger him."

"But he looks so cruel."

"Do not anger him, I again tell you."

"But why did you not return to my home?"

"Our chief came aboard and we are off for a cruise."

"And you are running from that vessel?"

"Yes, and gaining upon her too, rapidly, but we run upon her in a fog-bank."

"What is she?"

"An American vessel-of-war."

"And do American vessels-of-war fight each other?" persisted the boy.

A troubled look crossed the face of the lieutenant, and before he could answer a shot from the heavy pivot-gun on the stern of the schooner cut away the foremast of the sloop-of-war and a wild cheer broke from the crew of the flying craft, a cheer in which Gordon heartily joined.

As the sloop-of-war was forced to give up the fight, she wore around and poured her whole broadside into the flying schooner.

The effect was severe, for the pivot-gun was dismounted, pinning a man's leg beneath the wreck, and others fell dead and wounded upon the deck.

"By Heaven, that boy did not flinch," cried the stern voice of the chief, as he beheld Gordon gazing upon the dead and suffering about him with a pale face, but one that was utterly fearless.

The crew of the schooner at once set to work to repair damages, and Lieutenant Bestor sprung to aid them, the stern-faced captain looking on without an atom of pity it seemed for the suffering of those about him.

But though the schooner had been badly cut up in her running fight with the sloop-of-war, and had suffered severely in killed and wounded, she had not been injured to an extent to prevent her sailing with remarkable speed.

When the morning dawned she was out in the Gulf, but a heavy fog-bank came over the sea and suddenly the little vessel found herself in close proximity to a large vessel-of-war.

At once she stood away in flight, but in going about her creaking blocks were heard, then she was sighted and the chase was begun.

The wind freshened and the schooner dodged her large enemy in the dense fog; but only for a while, as the mist arose from the waters and the cruiser was seen not very far distant.

Away sped the schooner, and wearing ship the sloop-of-war started in chase, and it was the gun from the former that had aroused Gordon from his slumbers.

As the pursuer was out of the chase, from the crack shot of the pivot-gun, the schooner was, however, kept on her course under all canvas, while the men were set to work to clear decks and get the beautiful craft ship-shape once more.

The chief had watched the sloop-of-war for a while and then said:

"That shot sends her to New Orleans for repairs, Bestor; but it was a close shave for us."

"A close one indeed, sir, and only the Idle Wings' speed saved her," replied the officer addressed.

"As it has often done before and must do again: but, my lad, how do you like a sea-fight?" and the chief turned to Gordon, whose sympathy was shown in his face for the wounded men among the crew.

"It is cruel, sir."

"Cruel yes, but men are merciless ever in their hunt for gold."

"I thought American sailors fought for glory, sir."

The chief laughed and replied:

"Those men on yonder crippled craft may do so, my lad; but upon this schooner we fight for that which rules the world—gold!"

"See, there is my flag, and it will be yours, for I shall make you my *protege*," and the schooner's commander pointed to the peak where, with a startled cry the kidnapped boy saw the black flag of the pirate floating.

There could be no mistake, for in the center were the white skull and crossbones which Gordon knew so well as the fearful symbol of the pirate.

CHAPTER X.

A YOUNG BUCCANEER.

HAD Gordon Grayhurst been a few years older, the thought that he was upon a pirate craft would have impressed him more deeply than he did.

As it was he was startled at first, and then he looked at Lieutenant Bestor with reproach in his eyes, and that officer hastened to say:

"Captain Pierre, I beg you to explain to the boy the situation, for I see that he regards me as his kidnapper, and may expect harm at our hands."

"Come with me to the cabin, lad," said Captain Pierre not unkindly.

The boy glanced at Bestor again, and saw a look for him to obey.

He feared the pirate chief, and so looked to Bestor who had treated him so well for sympathy.

"Sit there, lad, and listen to me."

"You are a brave fellow, and I know of your nerve and deeds, for we have met before though I will not tell you where."

"With your parents the world went well, as it has with many others, for gold was theirs, and all they wished for happiness they could command."

"With me it was different—are you listening, lad?"

"Yes, sir."

"You understand me?"

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"Well, I loved one who refused my love, and married one whose birth gave me cause to hate."

"I went away, became a wanderer, was wrecked on the coast of Morocco and became a captive of Moors."

"Then I saved the life of a great man and from a slave, as I was, he made me an officer on his vessel."

"That vessel was no more than a Moorish corsair, and though third in command on board of her I was really a prisoner, for I was allowed little freedom and fewer rights."

"By the loss in battle of the officer above me I was promoted, and this again occurred, and I became next in rank to the *Rais*, or captain."

"One day a mutiny arose and I quelled it, but the captain was killed and I was commander."

"I had killed men in battle to gain booty for my master, so decided to be my own property and never again visited the ports of the Moors."

"An American vessel captured my craft one day, with all my booty, and I would have been hanged at the yard-arm for piracy but for my guard having once been captured by the Moorish craft I was an officer on, and I saved his life."

"He aided me to escape, but had to go with me to save himself from death, and I escaped the yard-arm."

"That man is my lieutenant, Frank Bestor."

"We had but a few dollars in gold between us, and so I again turned to piracy, while he went his way."

"I went to Spain, thence shipped for Cuba, there got to be mate of an African slaver and her captain turned her into a pirate, so I was again under the free flag."

"The captain was killed in a fight we had with a richly freighted ship, which fought us so hard the men vowed to kill all on board."

"There were few left to kill, for they had fought to the last, and those few were put to death by the maddened crew, with one exception."

"That exception was the mate, my friend, Frank Bestor, who was badly wounded, and I saved him from my men, took care of him until he got well, and made him my officer."

"Are you listening, Master Gordon Grayhurst?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, I wanted just such a lad as you are, and you came on board my vessel in my absence, and Bestor told me of you, so I decided to make you my *protege*, giving you the rank of a junior officer on board, and you are to do your duty as such, for you are a good little sailor as it is and will soon learn what is expected of you."

"Oh, sir, my poor parents will believe me dead, and it would break my dear mother's heart to think I was a pirate, sir."

"Let me go home, sir, for I will walk if you will only put me ashore."

"Don't be a fool, Master Gordon Grayhurst, for you were intended for a sailor, and your parents meant that you should go in the navy and become a pirate-hunter."

"I intend that you shall be a pirate, so there is little difference, my lad, only you hunt for gold and they hunt down gold-hunters, do you see?"

"It will kill my mother," moaned Gordon.

"Your mother thinks you are dead, as does your father, for your boat went ashore that night of the storm, so they will think that you are up with the angels, while in reality you are at sea with the devils who fly the black flag."

"Don't get weak now, like a girl, for you will become a great man in time, and then if you wish to give up piracy, why of course you can."

"It would have been a long time before you wore shoulder-straps in the navy, and here you shall be an officer as soon as the ship's tailor can make your uniform, and the men will have to regard you as such."

"Now, Officer Grayhurst, go to the tailor and tell him to fit you out, and then report on the quarter-deck for duty."

But Gordon did not move.

He sat like one in a dream.

His thoughts were of his mother, his father, of dear little Estelle.

At home he was regarded as dead.

In reality he was forced to become a buccaneer.

Could he not escape in some way?

He looked up as the thought flashed through his brain, and the pirate read his thoughts.

"No, you cannot escape, lad, for like myself on the Moorish corsair, though an officer, every

man will be on the watch for any attempt on your part to get away."

"Then you must remember that pirate vessels seldom enter ports."

"We do our work at sea, and when we need repairs, or hide booty, it is on some deserted island where escape is impossible."

"You must do as I order, Officer Grayhurst, or you will find that I can force you to obedience, for the hold of a vessel is not a pleasant place, nor is salt horse and dry bread the best of food."

"Here in the cabin with Bestor and myself will be your quarters—But what are you looking at so? Surely your eyes can see no red stains upon my hands!" the pirate said, almost fiercely.

"You are Captain Pierre, the Pirate, you said, sir."

"Yes."

"Oh, what tales they tell of your cruel red deeds, sir!"

"Doubtless; yet the devil is said not to be as black as he is painted, lad; but, what are your eyes again on my hand for?"

"I know you, sir—you are Pierre, the Pirate, but you are also Monsieur Belgarde, of Castle Moro," cried the kidnapped lad, and he added:

"I know you by that ring!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PIRATE'S RING.

THE man calling himself Captain Pierre, and who was dreaded on sea and along the shores of the Gulf, the Atlantic and the Caribbean Seas, as "Pierre, the Pirate," was no ordinary person.

His nationality he had made known to no one, but his story in part he had confessed to a boy, in the cabin of his pirate schooner.

I say in part, for there was much that he had left untold, and in the unknown part could have been traced his reasons for his conduct toward Gordon Grayhurst, the brave lad who had saved his life, knowing him only as Monsieur Belgarde.

It was an unknown part of his life that had caused him to buy the deserted plantation villa of Juan Moro, the Spaniard, who, with his wife and others had met death there in some tragic manner.

He was a man of strange character, true as steel to one he liked and bitter as death to one he hated.

He loved Frank Bestor as a brother, and yet he had made a pirate of him, for the young man had fought hard against the fate of outlawry.

He too had a history, and it was desperation that had made him a free rover, with the urging of Captain Pierre.

He sought to win gold, and once he had it he hoped to bury forever the remembrance of how it had been gotten.

Frank Bestor had taken a strange fancy to this pirate commander of his, and he knew that he had good qualities as well as bad ones.

No man was kinder to his crew, or more generous with them in the distribution of booty, and they idolized him in return, knowing that they would be always given the lion's share of treasure, protected and cared for, while in battle they had no fear of being defeated under such a leader.

A perfect sailor, Captain Pierre was a fearless man, strong as a lion and when in battle a demon.

His men knew him well, and were aware that while he would risk life to save one of them, that one he would mercilessly cut down if he saw him falter in his duty.

But the Idle Wings's last cruise had not been a successful one, so far as gaining much valuable booty was concerned.

Prizes had been taken, but they had not been rich ones, and for that reason did Captain Pierre determine to sail for some far-away land.

He hoped to capture some richly-freighted Spanish vessels, perhaps an Algerine or Moorish corsair, loaded with booty, and then run to the coast of Africa, get a large human freight in poor Africans, and sell them at an enormous profit in Cuba.

"Then I can retire from the sea on my fortune," he had said to Officer Bestor, and he added:

"Then I have work to do, and when done, I shall live as a gentleman the remaining days of my life, for no one will ever know me as having been Pierre the Pirate, Bestor."

"I hope not, sir," answered Bestor, who was also dreaming of a like consummation of his hopes.

And the schooner was bound for the coast of Spain when her commander had kidnapped Gordon Grayhurst.

At the remark of Gordon that he recognized him, knew him by the ring he wore, the pirate captain started and his face turned livid.

He glanced earnestly at the youth, and then at his ring.

Placing his hand over it so as to conceal it from the sharp eyes of the youth, he said, in a low tone:

"So you recognize me, Master Gordon Grayhurst?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who did you call me just now?"

"Monsieur Belgarde."

"Ah! And who is Monsieur Belgarde?"

"Pierre the Pirate is."

"Ah! You are a shrewd one for your years!"

"But can you not be mistaken in a face?"

"Not in yours, sir, though you wore a beard then and long hair."

"You think so?"

"I know it, sir; and there are two scars I recognize—one on your forehead, the other on your hand."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"The ring."

"Yes, the ring; but what did you note about that?"

"It is the one I saw you wear as Monsieur Belgarde, and you sealed the note with it that you sent to Officer Bestor by me, and I found the sealing-wax with the seal on it, so kept it, and I have it now."

"Master Gordon Grayhurst, you are a very discerning young man."

"You see what many men never would, and you put things together like a Government Secret Service man, so you are not one to undervalue."

"Suppose I confess that I am one whom you knew as Monsieur Belgarde—what then?"

"I know you are, sir."

"Granted."

"Why did you steal me from my home, sir?" and the hand of the boy quickly rose to brush away a tear.

"To make a pirate of you, my lad."

"My father told me that pirates were sea-thieves."

"Your father is not well-posted on that question I see; but let me explain that a thief who steals ashore is not to be compared with us free rovers."

"We defy the elements, we herd together for protection against those who would hunt us down and hang us, and we arm our decks with guns to defend ourselves and our vessels."

"We risk our lives for gold and fight to the death our foes."

"Oh, no, the life of a free rover is a sinful one, but we must not be classed with thieves, my lad, and you must not use such a naughty word in speaking of us, for remember, you are one of us yourself."

"Oh, sir! do not force me to do wrong," pleaded the boy.

Captain Pierre made no reply.

He glanced down into the pleading face a moment, and there was a look of kindness in the eyes which urged Gordon to say:

"Do not make me do wrong, be a pirate, please sir, for remember, I saved your life once, and you ought not to hurt me by making me kill and steal."

The face of the pirate changed like a flash.

The look of kindness was gone, and the eyes looked like a tiger's in their ferocity, while the deep voice quivered as Pierre the Pirate said:

"It is because you saved my life, boy, that I do not kill you now."

Then he hailed the deck.

"Ho the deck!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and Officer Bestor stood in the companionway.

"The sharp eyes of this boy recognized in Pierre the Pirate, Monsieur Belgarde of Castle Moro, so he is to be watched very closely that he does not make his escape."

"Should he do so, I will put to death the officer on duty at the time and every man of the watch."

"But, Officer Bestor, he is to be third lieutenant on board of this craft, and in all things to be treated as such. You understand?"

"I do, sir."

"That is all," and turning to the boy he continued:

"Now, sir, go to the tailor and order your outfit, as I commanded you."

Gordon had well noted the sudden change in the pirate's face, and was startled by his fierce words, but could not understand why Captain Pierre would have taken his life.

He saw that he was in a tiger's power, and he had human nature well enough, young as he was, to promptly obey the order given him, and he did so, going at once to the ship's tailor.

Two days after he came out in a full-fledged officer's uniform, and boy that he was, he could not but feel proud of his appearance and the respect paid him by the crew, and this served in part as a balm to his wounded feelings.

CHAPTER XII.

THE IDLE WINGS AT WORK.

Too young to bear malice long, and treated with the utmost kindness by Pierre, the Pirate, Gordon, who had become known among the crew as "Lieutenant Grayhurst," and the "Boy Officer," entered into his duties with considerable interest after a few days on board ship.

A severe storm that the schooner was caught

in while in the Gulf, gave him an idea of the sea in a tempest, and also what perfect management, skill and discipline could accomplish, for the schooner rode out the blow in magnificent style, where the lad felt that it would be impossible for her not to go under.

He had the pride to wish to appear well before the men, and went to work hard to study up not only his own duties, but what every one on the schooner had to do, from the powder-monkeys to the captain.

The chief, Bestor and himself roomed in the cabin, there being half a dozen comfortable state-rooms there, the rest being reserved for special prisoners, or the most valuable booty.

Captain Pierre lived well, and it was always his order to rob the larder of a prize as soon as the treasure had been taken.

The other officers, those after Bestor, whose rank was that of senior lieutenant—acting as first and second lieutenants, were thorough seamen, but of no particular force.

They had their quarters in the ward-room, had made no comment about their chief making a boy a lieutenant, and treated him with the respect they would have shown a brother officer who was double his years.

Captain Pierre was a stickler for discipline, and no man-of-war of any navy was better governed or kept in better trim for a cruise or a fight.

He loved show—he and his officers were gorgeously uniformed, while the men were kept tidy and wore red skull-caps, blue shirts and white pants.

Of course the Idle Wings had many disguises for herself and crew, and Gordon was interested in witnessing the changes that could be made in a vessel when a prize or a cruiser was sighted.

Meeting some stores for his long run, Captain Pierre had placed all of his guns in the hold, bent on a new set of sails, old and ragged, painted the hull a dingy brown, housed the topmasts and needle-like bowsprit, and, with three-fourths of his crew below decks, had boldly run into San Augustine as a merchant craft in distress.

He got to sea again after he had purchased the necessary stores, and Gordon even cheered with the men at the *ruse* of their daring captain.

Then, too, the schooner would be metamorphosed to slip up on a prize, and again she would play off as an American, Spanish or English schooner-of-war, to catch some vessel flying one of those flags.

In spite of himself Gordon came to admire the daring pirate before the shores of Spain were sighted, and by that time he had shown himself to be a most apt student in the art of seamanship.

Several chases had occurred, from various vessels-of-war fallen in with, and the Boy Officer had been most enthusiastic in the escape of the Idle Wings through her superior speed.

One bright, moonlight night Gordon was on duty on deck, and alone.

If any other officer was ready to lend his aid, if needed, he kept out of sight, awaiting call, and the young buccaneer could not but feel his importance.

He had been eight months a pirate, and in that time had learned much.

The schooner had captured many prizes, but none of much value.

She had weathered scores of storms, some of them fearful tempests, and had fought off several foes, while she had been forced to run time and again from large cruisers.

Gordon had not forgotten his home.

He had not forgotten the loved ones there who deemed him dead.

But all seemed like a dream to him, so much had he seen and passed through since he had been kidnapped and forced into piracy.

He had stepped across the threshold of his teens, and the rank he held had made him begin to feel like a man.

He was growing rapidly, looked as handsome as a picture in his uniform, was the idol of the pirate crew, and could not but be deeply impressed with his surroundings, even pleased with them at times.

This night he had begun duty as an officer of the deck.

If Bestor, who had ever shown the deepest interest, yes, affection for him, was on the watch to lend a hand or advice, the Boy Officer did not know it.

The chief had given orders that he should stand his watch with the other lieutenants, beginning that night at eight bells.

The night was clear, the moon shone brightly, and an eight-knot breeze was sending the schooner swiftly along over the sea, when from the mast-head rung out:

"Sail, ho!"

"Ay, ay, whereaway?" came in the shrill voice of the Boy Officer from the quarter-deck.

"Dead ahead, sir, and coming toward us before the wind."

"Ay, ay, keep a close watch and report what she is."

The lookout did so, while the Boy Officer leveled his glass at the stranger.

A white speck only was visible, but it was

coming toward the schooner, as she was then heading almost in the wind's eye.

In ten minutes the lookout again haled the deck.

"Ay, ay! what do you make her out?" asked Gordon Grayhurst.

"A canteen rig, sir, carrying a great deal of sail, and surely a Moor or an Algerine."

"Report when you can tell me more."

Then Gordon again paced the deck until the lookout haled:

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ay, ay, aloft!"

"She's a pirate, sir, I am sure."

The Boy Officer ran lightly up into the rigging, leveled his glass at the stranger for an instant, and then returned to the deck and at once gave orders to go about and run for it, at the same time ordering the cannon to be hidden from the view of the chase when he should come nearer, and that the crew should remain below decks.

"We are too fast for him, so drop a drag overboard," said Gordon, as he saw that the schooner could outfoot the stranger.

A drag was lowered over the sides, and the stranger soon began to gain rapidly.

"Pass the word below for the men to be ready to rush up to quarters when needed, and I will report the situation to Captain Pierre," said Gordon.

But just then Captain Pierre came on deck.

He had been an attentive listener to all that had occurred, but he said indifferently:

"A sail in sight, Master Gordon?"

"Yes, sir, an Algerine or a Moor, and so it must be a pirate, and I changed the course of the schooner, covered up the guns and am running for it, with drags overboard so we cannot escape him."

"Gordon, you are worth your weight in gold, and as you have begun so well, you shall fight the schooner yourself."

"It is a case of dog eat dog, for us to take a pirate; but our prizes of late have been next to valueless, so we may capture a treasure in this fellow."

"Do just as you deem best in the matter," and Captain Pierre returned to the cabin, leaving his boy lieutenant to fight the schooner as well as he could, and, in fact, to take his own plan of attacking the cruiser, and if too much for him to get out of it as he could.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOG EAT DOG.

THE moment that the schooner turned in flight the lateen-rigged craft sighted seemed to be sure of a prey.

Her huge sails were bent to catch every breath of air and she came flying along over the waters with a lock that told she meant mischief.

The Idle Wings went careering along, but with the drag on her of a number of fathoms of heavy cable, trailing on either side, her speed was checked to an extent that enabled the stranger to rapidly gain.

At last the pursuer was within easy range, and she had kept silent where those on the schooner had expected her to fire long before.

A flash of flame came from her bows and a heavy shot flew over the decks of the Idle Wings.

To keep up the idea that the schooner was a merchant craft, Gordon had one of the light guns run aft so as to reply only with that.

Of course its shot hardly reached the former, and yet a running fire was kept up.

The fire of the pursuer was getting very dangerous, and standing on deck Captain Pierre and Frank Bestor closely watched the Boy Officer.

"Stand by to lower away with a run the mainsail and topsail, as though cut down by a shot," cried Gordon and the men sprung to obey.

"Now fire one more shot from that light gun and then run it back to its place!"

"Ay, ay, sir," said the officer in charge.

Watching his chance as a shot came from the pursuer, and barely passed over the heads of the crew, Gordon gave the order:

"Let her go!"

Down came the sails with a run, and the schooner yawed wide, all so well-timed that it looked as though the shot had done the damage.

The yell from the pursuers reached the ears of those on the schooner, which continued her flight once more under reduced sail.

The pursuer seemed so sure of his prey that he ceased firing, and came rapidly on, now not half a mile distant.

"That was a splendid ruse, my gallant boy lieutenant and ably executed."

"The devil thinks he has crippled us," cried Captain Pierre.

The mainsail of the schooner, after some delay, as though to repair damages, was run up again, and the pursuer, now not a quarter of a mile away opened fire once more.

This shot told well, for it cut in among the crew of the schooner, and several fell to the deck to rise no more, while half a dozen were wounded.

An ugly light came into the eyes of Captain Pierre at this; but he uttered no word and gazed upon his boy lieutenant to see what would be his next move.

Again the pursuer fired and the schooner was hit, but not badly hurt.

"Bring her to, helmsman, and Senor Caras uncover the guns," called out the shrill voice of Gordon Grayhurst.

The orders were obeyed, but ere the schooner became motionless the Boy Officer gave the command to let her wear round to catch the wind on the starboard.

It looked to the pursuers as though she was being handled awkwardly in coming to, but there came the command:

"Port broadside, fire!"

The schooner reeled under the shock of her broadside, and so did the pursuer.

Down came two of the lateen sails at a run, cut loose by the fire of the schooner, and mingling with the crash of timbers came wild cries of pain and surprise.

"Put about on the other tack.

Starboard broadside, fire!"

The maneuver and the shots were promptly executed and the pursuer was badly crippled while demoralization reigned on board to find a wolf where they had expected to take a lamb.

Up toward the enemy headed the schooner, running close into the wind, while the lateen rig, with her sails crippled, was drifting before the wind and was now but a couple lengths away.

Another broadside was given the enemy, poured right in among the crew, and at short range, and then the schooner headed directly for her.

Captain Pierre had given no order, but had watched his boy lieutenant with the eye of a hawk.

"That boy will command a pirate ship before he is out of his teens, Bestor," cried the admiring pirate captain.

"Yes, sir; but is he going to meet her head on?" responded Bestor somewhat anxiously, and his anxiety was felt by the crew.

"I gave him command and if he makes a mistake it is his fault," was the reply.

"It is a fearful test to put him to, sir."

"He has nerve—yes, and skill, too."

"Wait and see."

"She is a heavy craft, sir, and might sink us under such a blow as we will get."

"True; but the boy may remedy that in time.

"If not, I'll suggest it to him."

All were anxious now on the schooner, seemingly, for the vessels were approaching each other rapidly, the lateen-rig before the wind and the Idle Wings on the starboard tack.

Should they meet under such circumstances, one or both of them would go down.

All eyes were turned upon the young officer.

He was cool as an icicle and watching the lateen-rig through his glass, and could see the crew rapidly repairing the damage done them so they could bring their guns upon their approaching foe.

It seemed to all that the collision must come, and Captain Pierre was about to speak, when suddenly came the order:

"Luff sharp! Starboard battery, fire!"

The lateen-rig went flying by, almost touching the schooner, and getting her broadside with terrible effect.

Ere the roar of the guns had died away came the command:

"Ready about!"

As though on a pivot the schooner went around, her other battery pouring a destructive fire upon the enemy, and then she was in chase of the crippled craft, her bow-guns raking her from stern to bows.

"Boy, you are a wonder!" shouted Captain Pierre, and a cheer rung out from the crew for their boy lieutenant.

Another moment and amid the roar of the guns from both vessels the schooner overhauled the lateen-rig, grapnels were thrown, and the crew of the Idle Wings boarded her with a rush.

The dark-faced Moors met them as best they could, but their fierce natures had been cowed by the surprise they had received in "catching a Tartar," and their decks were strewn with dead and wounded, while their vessel was crippled in rig, her bright bulwarks stove in and several guns dismounted.

Flushed with victory, the crew of the Idle Wings made short work of their foes, as long as they resisted, and then came the deep voice of Captain Pierre:

"Spare all who cry for quarter! I need them to fill up my crew."

The fight was won, and the victory was admitted to be the work of the Boy Officer.

The prize, too, was a valuable one, for it proved to be a Moorish corsair returning home after a successful cruise, and besides the rich booty on board, Captain Pierre found much that was needed to fit out his own vessel, while, as he spoke the Moor tongue, he readily got two-score of the crew of the captured craft to serve with him, as gold and bloodshed was all they cared for to make life endurable.

"A couple were made captives, Bestor, and we will be able to run to the slave coast to get our cargo and return to American waters," cried Captain Pierre the next day, after he had taken all from the prize they wished and set her on fire.

"Yes, captain, and I do hope, if you will pardon me for saying so, that you will, after you have reaped your fortune, let that splendid boy return to his home, for he can enter the United States' Navy and make a famous name for himself."

The face of Captain Pierre darkened.

"Bestor, I will never let that boy go home.

"He shall become a pirate and his parents shall know it, and then he must die, for I have vowed that it shall be so.

"The boy shall never again set foot on American soil, and, if you value my friendship, never again ask mercy for him from me, for I am merciless there."

Frank Bestor sighed and responded:

"I shall not offend again, Captain Pierre, as regards young Grayhurst."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE SLAVE COAST.

THE hoped-for prizes, like the Moorish corsair, were not taken by the Idle Wings, and so Captain Pierre, having been cruising for over a year, since leaving American waters, headed for the coast of Africa.

He knew that he could get a cargo of slaves that would be most valuable, and he was anxious to get back again to the West Indies.

So the schooner was headed for the coast of Africa, at a point which Captain Pierre had visited in years past, and her crew began to prepare the vessel for human freight.

The craft ran into the river at night and made her way up to an anchorage, and Captain Pierre went ashore to a native village to find a trader.

This was no difficult matter, and when a slave-trader was found negotiations were entered into for a full freight for the schooner of able bodied captives.

The trader asked the pirate chief to send an officer and several men with him to select and guard the prisoners, and Frank Bestor volunteered to go, while Captain Pierre said:

"I am not afraid of the boy's escaping in this country, so take him along for the run ashore.

"Besides, I think he has really come to like his pirate life, and in the year and a half that has passed from home has almost forgotten his parents."

"Yes, childhood memories are readily obliterated, chief, especially where one passes through the stirring scenes that have been the lot of young Grayhurst since he left home.

"I think the boy will be useful to me."

So Frank Bestor, Gordon and six men went along on the expedition with an agent of the trader, to select the African captives from the prison corrals and drive them back to the coast.

The party had not been gone many hours when the trader came hastily out to the schooner and was met at the gangway by Captain Pierre.

"You must get to sea, captain, for a spy from up the coast reports a vessel-of-war coming down close inshore and sending boats into the inlets."

"This means that she will reach this river?"

"Yes, captain."

"Can I not go up further and hide?"

"No, for some one will prove traitor and report to the commander of the war-vessel that you are there and the result will be he will anchor in the river and blockade you."

"What is to be done?"

"Get down the river and out to sea at once, captain."

"But my senior officer, young lieutenant and half a dozen men are away, as you know."

"It will take them some days to return, and in that time you can get back."

"There is a wooded point five leagues down the coast and an anchorage beyond it, so go there and await until I send you word to return."

"Keep a lookout on the point day and night for cruisers though, so as not to be surprised."

"I will, and you will see to my officers and men?"

"Certainly, and to the slaves."

"Should the cruiser remain in the river for a long while?"

"Then I will have the slaves meet you at the point."

"Now pray lose no time."

The order was given to get the anchor up and boats out to tow the schooner down the river, and Captain Pierre again turned to the trader:

"And will they not find you here?"

"Oh yes, but blackened up, with a wig on and rings in my nose and ears they will take me for what I always pretend to be."

"And what is that?"

"An African chief who understands English and so gets paid as an interpreter."

"I have fooled the captains many a time this way and made considerable gold for services rendered, though I was never clear as to just what the services were."

"And do you intend to keep this life up, Carmal?"

"Until I get rich, captain, and then I shall go and enjoy my riches in civilization, as you doubtless will."

"Yes, Carmal, we all work for one end, gold, and we hope that it will bring us happiness."

"Luxury it may bring, but to how many happiness? for think you not that you will ever hear the moans of the poor captives you sell into slavery, and recall how many thousands your getting rich has cost?"

"Ah, yes, I will recall all, as sure as Captain Pierre will his piracies."

"You are right, Carmal, neither of us can forget, have we untold wealth."

"But my ship is ready to go."

"Good-by, captain, and remember, in two days I will have a messenger at the wooded point ten leagues below to meet you."

"I will be there, Carmal, and take care of my officers and men, for there is one with them for whom I would lose ship and crew rather than be cheated out of the revenge which I am treasuring up for him, or rather through him for others."

"They will be all right, captain, unless the Man-Hunters attack them."

"And these Man-Hunters?"

"Are the worst foes we traders have, for they are a body of Africans, powerful, fearless, and perfect devils, and they often attack and capture a caravan of slaves, and run them off to some port where they have vessels in waiting, who pay them a liberal price for each capture."

"But Man-Hunters have not been often seen of late in these parts, as they ran upon an American cruiser's crew and were cut up fearfully; but good-by, captain, I'll hope to see you soon again."

The trader then took his departure from the schooner to return to his hut in a village on the river-bank, where he really had gained an ascendancy as chief.

A shrewd, miserly fellow, he had hoarded up a large fortune already, but held on year after year to get more.

With rings fastened upon his nose and ears, his face and body dyed black by a peculiar bark juice, a rig cleverly made by himself, he, with other means of disguise, certainly looked the brutal African chief he professed to be.

He watched the schooner sail out of sight, and then said to himself:

"That fellow of mine, Dunkirk, is up to some mischief with those officers he took into the corral, I am sure."

"If he makes any money out of them in any way, though how he can I do not see, he must let me share with him."

"This life is too terrible, too lonesome and dangerous, not to make everything I touch turn to gold."

"Well, I have my treasure, and a fine one it is, too; but I must add to it a little more before I go from here."

"Then I can enjoy life to its full bent, for I am not an old man yet—oh no, not yet fifty," and the man, who looked ten years older than he was, laughed as he deceived himself as to his age, as all men and women are wont to do when the years begin to tell upon us.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEA DUEL.

THE schooner dropped out of the mouth of the river just in the nick of time, for not a league away, coming down the coast, was a brig-of-war, and she was bringing with her a good breeze.

"Half an hour more and we would have had a hard fight of it to escape, Caras," said Captain Pierre, as he ordered every stitch of canvas that would draw to be set upon the schooner, and that the men should then go to the guns, for, as it was, they would have to fight off the brig, especially if she was a swift sailer, there being hardly a breath of wind where she was, though the cruiser had a good breeze bearing her along at a lively pace.

In his former experience in the slave-trade, Captain Pierre had learned much that was now useful to him.

He saw that the brig was an American, the worst foes of the slavers, though slavery was allowed under its flag.

The work was not distasteful to officers and men, and they would make short work of it if they could.

The climate was unhealthful, and sickness was general aboard a ship stationed on the African coast.

Then the weather was hot, there were no ports where provisions could be obtained of a suitable kind, and though the capture of a slaver proved a good prize, they liked not the service.

There were the poor wretches thrown upon their hands, and they had to return to the coast with them, and altogether the service was disgusting to men of spirit, and they shunned it.

If there was the shadow of an excuse for stringing up the captain and crew of a slaver, when captured, the captors were not long in doing so.

All this did Captain Pierre know.

He was well aware that he would be dealt with, if taken, as severely as though he was known to be a pirate.

If the commander of the brig suspected that he was running out of the river to escape from him, and to return for his cargo of slaves, he would anchor off the river for weeks, patrol with his boats the coast up and down for leagues, and thus cut him out of getting the human freight he sought.

"The best thing to do, Caras, is to put a bold face on it, let him know I am a pirate and merely took refuge in the river for a few days for water, and what stores I could pick up."

"Yes, captain."

"Throw open the ports, show our iron dogs and up with the black flag."

The order was obeyed, and the sable flag was unfolded at the peak, showing the emblem of the pirate.

But upon each side of the grinning white skull two large red wings had been fastened, emblematical of the name of the schooner, Idle Wings, as well as the carmine hue of them representing that their mission was a red or deadly one.

The brig-of-war was a trim craft, heavier in tonnage than the schooner by fully sixty tons, and carrying a larger crew with a battery of several more guns of larger caliber.

Her masts rose to a great height, and her main boom, yards and bowsprit showed considerable length over the average, indicating the spread of a vast amount of canvas.

When the schooner glided out of the mouth of the African river, the brig was just one league away, and coming along with a breeze that thus far was all her own, the Idle Wings having, as has been said, but a capful of wind.

But the schooner moved off with the little she had, her men went to quarters, and she had set all of her canvas to catch the wind when it did reach her.

Should he be able to cripple the schooner before she got a fair start, the captain of the brig knew she was his prize.

And more, well aware of the speed of his own beautiful vessel, and not having tested that of the schooner, he felt as it was, that the stranger was his game.

When, with a defiant gun to windward the Idle Wings set her black flag, all was excitement on the brig.

They saw the ports open, the guns run out, and the red caps of her crew, and, where they had expected to find a slaver they discovered that they would have to fight for the prize they coveted.

The schooner soon drew the fire of the brig, and it came with a broadside, for she could afford the time, as she had the breeze and the pirate was only creeping along.

The shots rattled about the buccaneer, a few doing slight damage, but neither Captain Pierre, his vessel or his crew flinched under the shock.

All were too well used to iron hail to dread it much at long range.

The schooner replied with a shot that drew blood forward among the crew of the brig, and thus the duel was opened.

The brig still gained rapidly, for the breeze seemed to be holding back with her; but, when a mile away the schooner caught it fair, and keeling gracefully over went flying through the waters.

As long as the brig had the most of the wind she gained; but when the breeze settled steadily down over the sea, it was shown that the schooner held her own, and, if anything, slightly gained on her pursuer.

It now became a stern chase, dead out to sea, with the schooner leading the brig a little short of a mile.

If the brig, from the schooner's wake, could rake her stem to stern, the pirate could send a raking fire from stem to stern of the cruiser.

Thus the chase continued, the schooner pouring a steady fire from her stern pivot-gun upon the brig, and the latter making her two bow-guns keep up a rapid fire upon the pirate.

Night came, and though the brig had more than met her match in speed, she yet kept hanging on close enough to keep the guns on her bows playing upon the buccaneer.

The effect was severe to both vessels, for though not vitally hurt, the schooner yet got some severe knocks, her sails were torn, and her crew suffered fearfully.

Now and then, when he saw that he steadily gained on his foe, Captain Pierre would wear around and give the brig a broadside, hoping to cripple her.

But the cruiser took the punishment and held steadily on, hoping to yet cripple the pirate and bring him to a trial of strength at close quarters.

All through the night the chase continued, the fire from both vessels being kept up steadily, and only at dawn had the schooner gained sufficiently for the shot of the brig to fall short.

"We have escaped him, Danvers; but the schooner is a wreck almost, and look at my poor crew," said Captain Pierre, addressing the second officer, for Caras had been killed by the brig's fire during the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

BESTOR'S STORY.

WHEN he saw that his fire fell short, the commander of the brig ceased firing, but still held on in chase.

Examined closely, it could be seen that the brig had been sadly cut up by the shot of the pirate, for one of her guns had been dismounted, her foremast had a great gash in it, the bowsprit had been splintered at the end, the bulwarks cut, the taffrail cut away and wheel crippled, while her rails were torn in many places.

Then, too, the loss to her crew had been severe, though her humane commander had sent below all men not needed at the two bow-guns and to man the ship.

He did this to avoid the heavy loss that would have surely followed had her decks been crowded with her whole crew.

Until late in the afternoon the brig followed the schooner, which being then nearly two leagues ahead, she gave up and squared away, evidently heading for the nearest European port for repairs.

The pirate chief had not followed his usual custom of throwing his dead overboard, for he had not cared that his enemy should know how heavily he had lost, and he knew glasses were keeping a close watch upon his decks.

The schooner had, as I have said, suffered terribly.

Her wheel was a wreck, and half a dozen helmsmen had fallen at it.

Guns were dismounted, bulwarks cut up, spars shattered, the deck torn up and the sails torn into strips in some places.

Then, too, the pirate commander had not spared his crew as had the brig's captain, and, since, after his capture of the Moorish corsair, he had a full crew, his loss had been appalling.

"Danvers, it will make short division, where it was long division before, as far as dividing booty is concerned," said Captain Pierre, grimly, addressing his lieutenant.

"Yes, sir, over half your men are gone."

"Well, we will get more than double our share, as I said, and the schooner, with what repairs we can put on her in that accursed river, will not be fit for much else than to run the cargo of blacks to Cuba."

"The brig has given up the chase, sir."

"Well, let him, and the devil be his captain; but I shall hold on until night and then run back for the river, for if we were caught now in one of those African hurricanes we would hardly live it out."

This the crew seemed also to understand, and they were glad to hear the order, when the brig was hull down, to put back for the coast.

The wind held fair, the sails were patched as well as they could be and kept in use, and the schooner made good headway on her return.

The dead were tossed overboard, and there was a constant dropping into the sea as the severely wounded died on the return.

The schooner was leaking badly, too, and it was with the greatest relief that at sunset the next day the point was reached where the trader was to have his messenger.

The messenger was there and came off in his canoe with a note to Captain Pierre.

It read:

"If you escape the Dreadnaught, the fleetest cruiser in any navy, return to the river at once."

"CARMAL."

"So that was the Dreadnaught, was it?"

"Well, I have heard of her, and always dreaded meeting her; but, fleet as she is, the Idle Wings crept away from her, but it was not an easy thing to do."

"I'll hardly meet her again, so my run back to Cuba will be a safe one."

"Put the schooner away, Danvers, for the river, and we will set to work on her, for it will take a week to put her in sea-trim again."

It was night when the Idle Wings dropped anchor in the river, and hardly had she done so when a boat came off rapidly toward her.

"Boat ahoy!" cried Captain Pierre, who was on deck, and knew that the men at the oars were not Africans.

"Ay, ay, sir, the Idle Wings," answered a voice.

"Ho, Bestor, that is your voice."

"Yes, sir."

"Ay, ay, come alongside at once, and you'll find us in a pretty mess."

The pirate officer soon sprung on deck, and behind him came two oarsmen.

"Captain Pierre, you see all that remains of my party," said Bestor, impressively.

"Great God! the boy! the boy, Bestor! what has happened?"

"We were attacked by Man-Hunters when near the slave corral, sir, and the poor boy was killed, with four others of my men."

"The rest of us reached the corral after a desperate fight, but the others fell."

"Bestor, did you see that boy slain?" asked the chief, in a low voice, hoarse with emotion.

"I saw him fall, sir, and I went out from the corral that evening and buried the bodies, for the Man-Hunters departed directly after the fight."

"Then there is no doubt about his death?"

"Could I doubt my own eyesight, sir? And you know what the Man-Hunters are—they never spare a white man."

"True; but it is hard for me to believe that boy has been cut off as he has."

"Why, I believed he bore a charmed life,

and would live until I decided that he should die."

"Curse those Man-Hunters! They have cut me out of a plot I had for sweet revenge; but so be it. I am not foiled yet, and I am glad that he is dead, for had he lived I would have expected him to turn up some day in spite of his being lost in an African jungle."

"You buried him, you say?"

"I shall be most glad to return with a party and fetch his body, Captain Pierre, to convince you."

"No, no, my dear Bestor, I do not doubt your word; only it is so hard to believe that he is dead, after all I had expected to make of him."

"But so be it, and African soil is just as good for a grave for him as any other."

"You do not know all that boy was to me, Bestor, so you cannot understand my anxiety about his being dead or alive."

"But you see we have had a hard time of it, too, for we struck the American brig Dreadnaught in a run out to sea, and she nearly wrecked us."

"I see that you have suffered, sir."

"Ah, yes, more than you can see now, for Caras is dead and half my crew, with others wounded, some of whom will die; but it will be less to divide the spoils among, Bestor, so that is something."

"And then the boy is lost, so that we three, myself, you and Danvers, must carry the schooner back."

"We can do it, sir."

"Oh, yes; but what of the slaves?"

"The Man-Hunters attacked on our way to the corral, sir, so they were not captured."

"And you brought them in safety?"

"Yes, sir."

"How are they?"

"In fine health, for I picked them."

"And good cattle?"

"Oh, yes; the very best."

"Well, we'll treat them well, feed them high, give them an airing on deck day and night, and not allow them to die off."

"We can keep them well by good treatment, sir."

"Yes; but how many of them have you?"

"One thousand."

"Ah! And with our reduced crew we must make room for them, and will."

"Let me see; hardly over one-tenth will die under good treatment, so say nine hundred to sell when we reach Cuba, and as a good lot they should bring four hundred dollars each, and their price here of fifty, with their expenses being small, will enable us to reap a handsome sum."

"I tell you, Bestor, we will not have what I hoped for from this cruise, but we can divide half a million, and your share will be a handsome one."

"I shall be satisfied with it, sir."

"I shall not be with mine, but I will not risk the life I have to get more."

"No, I will settle down and live in luxury the rest of my days."

"When will you sail, sir?"

"The moment our repairs are done, and we stow the blacks aboard," was the answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PIRATE SLAVER.

THE repairs to the schooner took all of a week, and then came the storing away of the living freight.

The scenes of the slave trade in all its cruelty have been told so often that they need not be described here; but it was the avaricious nature alone of Captain Pierre that prevented his treating the unfortunate blacks with the greatest brutality.

He looked upon each slave as representing so much gold, and therefore cared for him, or her, accordingly.

The schooner had been well arranged to receive her cargo.

She had a large hold and numerous hatches, and these were to be left open except in bad weather.

The blacks were placed in long rows and made as comfortable as possible, while a couple of hundred at a time, chained together, were allowed on deck ranged along the bulwarks.

The stores, taken from different prizes, were of the best, and plentiful, and the schooner had laid in a bountiful supply of water.

So Captain Pierre bade Carmal the trader farewell, and the Idle Wings set sail on her voyage to the West Indies.

Out of the river she glided, the wind was fair, the weather fine, and there was every promise of a rapid and successful voyage.

Captain Pierre had seemed strangely moody since he had heard of the death of his protege.

He had gone into the Boy Officer's state-room and ordered all left just as it was.

"I believe the man really loved the boy, in

spite of intending to use him as an object of revenge," said Frank Bestor, as he noticed the changed manner of his chief.

Once Bestor had spoken of the boy as he sat with Captain Pierre at dinner, and the pirate chief had at once said:

"We will not again refer to Lieutenant Grayhurst, if you please, Bestor."

"As you please, sir."

"He is dead, so let his memory die," returned the chief, and after that Gordon Grayhurst was not spoken of in the cabin of the schooner.

The men, however, often spoke of him, and the two who had been along when he lost his life had been made to tell their story of the affair over and over again.

It was little that they knew, more than that the young officer had been far in the lead, when a band of Man-Hunters had rushed upon them from a jungle.

The Boy Officer had fought bravely, they said, as far as they could see, but they were kept busy themselves, and the four Moors who had been along had been cut down also and slain, along with the gallant young sailor.

Lieutenant Bestor, with the trader's agent, themselves and the guard of blacks, had retreated to the corral and escaped.

Then the Man-Hunters had departed, and the lieutenant and trader's agent had gone out with several blacks and buried the dead.

That was all that the two sailors could tell of the affair; but they had to tell it over and over again, and even among that wild, desperate pirate crew, there were tears shed for the Boy Lieutenant of the Idle Wings.

With the first blow the suffering of the poor blacks began, and in spite of all care they were taken out half-dead, and in some cases dying, and the sea closed over them a minute after the breath left their body.

Then a Spanish vessel-of-war was sighted close aboard, one dark night of storm, and a chase was commenced.

Heavy firing was kept up, and one shot from the Spanish cruiser plowed its way through the living masses below decks.

The sight appalled them, and some were maddened at the sight.

But the schooner sped on, and when her superior speed dropped her pursuer out of range, the dead were thrown overboard, the mortally wounded followed, and the hold was cleared of its unfortunate mass of humanity, and put in good condition once more.

And so it went on during the long cruise, for, short though was the schooner's run, it was a weary age to all on board, and the high hills of Cuba were greeted with a cheer when at last they were sighted.

"About one-fourth gone, and half a hundred next to worthless, Bestor," said Captain Pierre, as he viewed his plight upon nearing the coast.

To a secret agent the blacks were to be delivered, and having sent Bestor in one night in a small boat to have all in readiness, the next evening the schooner headed into the anchorage, which Captain Pierre well knew.

Bestor and the agent awaited the arrival of the misery-laden craft, and having disposed of his cargo to good advantage, the schooner set sail, threw her guns overboard, and under the guise of a coaster, put into New Orleans.

There her booty readily found sale, the schooner was disposed of, the treasure divided, and Pierre the Pirate parted company with his fellow outlaws.

"Which way, Bestor?" he asked, as the two sat together in a room in a tavern, a few moments before they were to bid each other farewell.

"I am going to my home, sir."

"You have never told me where that is."

"Nor do I intend to, sir, for the past I hope to bury, as thoroughly as I will myself to all who have known me as an outlaw."

"You became an outlaw from force of circumstances, my dear Bestor, and your heart has never been in your red work, while I became a pirate from sheer love of deviltry, I suppose."

"Had it been different with me, perhaps I might have lived a life of honor."

"We none of us know how virtuous we are, how honorable, until we are sorely tempted."

"I was tempted and did not resist, so I am now what I am, and I shall sin in the future as in the past, to gain my ends."

"The boy is dead, but my revenge is not satisfied yet, and there is work for me to do."

"I hope I shall never have to turn pirate again; but if I do, I shall take life to gain gold just as readily as I have in the past."

"Well, we part here, you to go your way it seems, for I was going to ask you to still be my friend, and to accompany me where I go."

"I thank you, Captain Pierre, but I too have work to do, and our paths in life divide here."

"Farewell, and may no evil attend you."

The two men grasped hands and parted, each to go his separate way through life.

But that way was to one day bring them together again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DON JUAN MORO.

FOR some time after the supposed death of

Gordon Grayhurst a gloom rested upon all in the neighborhood of Belle Eden.

The bright, handsome boy had been so well known, and his deeds had made him a hero even among men.

His parents still held to the belief of his death, and nothing arose to cause them to believe otherwise.

What vessel it was that had been in the bay the night of Gordon's loss, they could not ascertain; but had they known it to have been a pirate craft they would indeed have feared the worst, a fate more than death for their boy.

The mother went daily to the tomb erected in *memoriam* of the one supposed to be at the bottom of the sea, and the little sister, Estelle, was wont to carry fresh flowers there to strew upon the marble, which the father mourned in secret.

As days went by there came a reason for some excitement in the neighborhood of Belle Eden, and that was the departure from Castle Moro of the mysterious old invalid, as he had been supposed to be, Monsieur Belgarde.

He had left Castle Moro as silently as he had come there, turning it over once more to the rats and owls, and, as the most superstitious of the neighbors said, the ghosts.

After his departure Castle Moro was avoided even more than it had been before, and gloom and desolation again claimed it as their own.

Thus the time passed away until, after two years had gone by a rumor became current that Castle Moro was to have another master.

The agent for the place, and from whom the rumor came, said that the new-comer was not to be as the last one had been, an exile, for he had given orders to spare no expense in fitting up the mansion and grounds, and furnishing it with the greatest luxury, and every comfort.

He was told to put workmen at once on the mansion, to make certain additions and changes, and also to have the best landscape gardeners go to work upon the grounds.

A new pier and boat-house was to be built, and from all accounts Castle Moro was to be far grander than it ever had been in its palmiest days.

The name of the new master of the castle was said to be Don Juan Moro, and he was an heir, so it was asserted, and kinsman to the one who had met, with his young bride, their tragic death in the old home.

Taking advantage of the place being in the hands of the workmen, the planters from far and wide drove to see the famous old homestead, and watch the progress of it toward a grandeur unequalled along the coast.

Whoever the new master was, he certainly was possessed of vast wealth, for not a dollar was spared in fitting up the mansion, stables, out-buildings and entire estate.

There was an elegant boat-house constructed, a pier jutted far out to deep water, and a channel-way was dredged that would permit of a vessel of good draught coming in to an anchorage in the little cove.

At last vessels began to arrive with furniture, and after a few weeks the house was in perfect condition to receive its master, for a number of servants had been sent over and placed in charge.

These servants did not even know the master they were to serve, but they had been selected for their superior worth as domestics.

The stables were filled with thoroughbred horses, and the stylish equipages sent to Castle Moro, were the admiration as well as the envy of the country folks.

All being in readiness for the coming of Don Juan Moro, every one was on the *qui vive* to see the rich master of Castle Moro.

One night a vessel ran into the cove and dropped anchor.

It was a yacht of ninety tons burden, beautifully modeled and carried three large pivot-guns, mounted forward, amidships and aft.

The crew of this yacht was most striking, for they were Africans who could not speak one word of English.

There were sixty of them, and a fierce-looking set of large, muscular men, dressed in the scant costume of their people, and as silent as ghosts, except when spoken to by their commander.

This commander was a large mulatto, one who spoke the tongue of the Africans, and also English perfectly.

He was as vain as a peacock, for he dressed with a gorgeousness that was most striking, and he acknowledged but one superior, and that one was Don Juan Moro.

The yacht was the Sea Shell, and the Don had her fitted up with great magnificence, while the crew of black savages were obedient to his every look and word.

He also spoke their language, and when he addressed them they bent before him as though he was their acknowledged king.

The Sea Shell was found at anchor in the cove off Castle Moro one morning, and Don Juan had taken possession of his home, so the entire community were greatly excited to see the noble Spaniard, for he was supposed to be a native of Spain.

The negroes on the neighboring plantations

caught a glimpse of the savage crew of the Sea Shell, and made up their minds to shun Castle Moro as they had done in the past.

After a few days at his new home, Don Juan received his first visitor.

He was seated in his luxurious library when a carriage rolled up to the door and a card was brought in to him by his liveried servant bearing the name of

"GASTON GRAYHURST,

Belle Eden."

The visitor was promptly admitted, and the planter beheld in Don Juan Moro a tall, finely formed man, with a face darkly bronzed, his hair worn long, falling in curls upon his shoulders, and his full beard reaching down almost to his waist.

He was dressed in the courtier's dress of Mexico, and certainly his attire was most gorgeous.

He arose and received his visitor with a smile and marked courtesy, dignified though it was, and as he spoke, Gaston Grayhurst of *Belle Eden* noted that there was a slight accent in his English pronunciation.

"We must be friends, Señor Grayhurst, if so it be your pleasure."

Gaston Grayhurst expressed himself as most anxious for such friendship, and then said thoughtfully:

"Pardon me, Don Juan, but may I ask if you recall ever having met me before?"

"No, señor."

"Your face comes back to me as one I had known, yet I cannot place when and where."

"A fancied resemblance to some friend, doubtless, señor."

"Yes, it must be so, and yet I cannot tell for the life of me who it is that you recall to my mind," and telling the Don he should expect him to dine at *Belle Eden* soon, Mr. Grayhurst departed, greatly impressed with his new neighbor and yet admitting to his wife when he returned home:

"There is something about him that I do not like, yet what it is I do not know."

"Still he is a man never to be one's intimate friend, wife."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OUTLAW'S RETURN.

UPON the coast of Massachusetts, in the outskirts of a pretty village, there stood at the time I write a house that was the pride of all the dwellers near it.

It was a large stone mansion, surrounded by a hundred acres of highly cultivated land, and about the house were ornamental grounds sloping to the edge of the water.

Upon a ridge that ended in a cliff over the harbor, was a pretty summer-house from which all vessels coming in and going out could be seen.

The mansion was the home of the great dignitary of the village, an ex-judge, and by name Henry Weston.

His service upon the bench had made him an austere man, even in his own household, and it was said that the only one that he had a smile for was his daughter, a beautiful girl of eighteen.

This daughter, Miriam, and his son, Carter, a young man of twenty-two, formed the household of Judge Weston, and it was said that, so great was their father's wealth, the two heirs would have a quarter of a million of dollars to divide between them at their father's death—and in those days that was a very large fortune.

One day Carter Weston was out sailing with a party of friends, his sister being of the number, and a squall capsized their boat.

It was blowing a gale, but through wind and wave a boat went to the rescue, and but for the daring of the sole occupant, all would have been lost.

As it was, two out of the seven were drowned, and had not the brave rescuer sprung overboard and, diving deep, brought Miriam to the surface after she had sunk, she too would have been of the number.

The rescuer was the son of a poor widow who dwelt upon the shore of the harbor in a pretty little cottage—all that had been left her by her husband, once a rich ship-owner.

The son, Frank Bestor, was a handsome young man who had been well educated, and then to support his mother had become a sailor.

It was no wonder that Miriam Weston looked kindly upon the preserver of her life and that of her brother.

Handsome, refined, educated and said to be a splendid, daring fellow, Miriam soon lost her heart to the young sailor, and he also fell desperately in love with her.

So matters went on until, one day, Frank Bestor asked the judge for the hand of his daughter.

It was a bold thing for a man to do, to ask Judge Weston to give him the idol of his heart, and especially for a poor man to do.

But Frank Bestor knew that his family was as good as was that of the judge, and his poverty was all there was against him, while he had prospects of future prosperity.

The judge grew angry at the request, and said:

"Frank Bestor, you are a bold man to ask for my child."

"True, you saved her from death, and her brother's life, also; but then, any other man might have done the same had he been near, and yet that would give him no claim to marry my daughter."

"Then you refuse, sir?" asked Frank Bestor, calmly.

"What are you worth?"

"Next to nothing."

"And my child is an heiress."

"It is not her money that I seek, sir."

"Then match her fortune with one equal her own, and you shall have her."

"Do you mean this, Judge Weston?"

"I do, for you are a fine fellow, and you saved her life, and have only your accursed poverty against you."

"Thank you, sir; but what fortune has your daughter, may I ask?"

"It will be over a hundred thousand clean dollars; but you show me that you possess one hundred thousand, and the child shall be your wife."

"You pledge yourself to this?"

"I do."

"You will give me five years?"

"Yes, for I believe the girl really loves you."

"Thank you, Judge Weston," and Frank Bestor took his leave.

That night, in the little arbor on the cliff overhanging the harbor, he parted with Miriam, and he said:

"I go to seek my fortune, Miriam, and remember you have pledged yourself to be true to me."

"Yes, forever," was the earnest reply.

And she meant it.

Two days after Frank Bestor sailed to seek his fortune, and the reader has seen how he became a pirate through force of circumstances.

Years passed away, and Frank Bestor came not.

But Miriam Weston was wont to go to the little arbor on the cliff each afternoon and watch for the coming of a sail that was bringing her lover to her.

Changes came, but still Miriam went to the spot she loved so well for its memories of the past, and one afternoon she saw a vessel standing in under full sail, and her heart gave a great bound as she thought aloud:

"My God! suppose that ship should bring him home now?"

"Ah me! will he ever come? Will he never come?"

"And were it not best that he should not?"

"Yes, far best, far best, that he never return."

She was a beautiful woman, with large, liquid black eyes and a form of rare grace, but upon her face had come a look that seemed not to have always rested there.

It was a look called there by sorrow, suffering, and its seal was stamped upon the lovely mouth and haunted the beautiful eyes.

The vessel that she saw coming in was a brig, and she appeared to have come from a long voyage.

She carried the Spanish flag at her peak, and at the fore was the United States colors.

She ran in rapidly, and by the helmsman stood the skipper.

But it was the helmsman's form upon whom the eyes of Miriam rested.

He was tall, well-dressed, and did not look like an ordinary seaman, though he was acting as pilot of the vessel into the harbor.

The channel was one difficult to run through, and yet the brig came swiftly on, not taking in sail or hesitating on her way.

"My heart told me so—it is Frank Bestor, for that is his well-known way of running into this port under full sail, where no one else dared do it."

"He has offered to pilot the brig in, for he is not in sailor costume."

"Now to meet him, and to have him know the worst."

She spoke in a low voice, and her face worked with emotion.

She saw the brig run in to her anchorage, luff sharp, the anchor was let fall, and a boat lowered carried the man at the helm toward a landing at a wooded point of land, where was visible a cottage.

It was the little home of Frank Bestor—the outlaw had returned home.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BROKEN PLEDGE.

THE man who sprung ashore at the little pier near the cottage was Frank Bestor.

He was dressed in a stylish suit of clothes, no longer as a sailor, though his face was deeply bronzed.

The men put his luggage ashore and there was considerable of it, and he bade them follow him with it up to the cottage.

A walk of two minutes brought him to the gate, and he entered.

The walk was weed-grown and the house had a deserted appearance, for the blinds were closed.

"Can my mother be dead?" came in a low tone from the strong man.

It certainly was not encouraging for him to find the house locked up, and he stood like one who had received a hard blow.

"Lads, put my traps there on the piazza, for the house is closed up, and I almost fear my dear old mother has passed away."

The men obeyed him, touched their caps with thanks as they received a generous reward for their services and turned away, leaving the returned outlaw alone in his home.

It was near sunset and he glanced about him anxiously.

But no one was in sight, and he stood like one undecided what to do.

At length, with a sigh, he turned to walk toward the village and know the worst.

As he did so a form glided up to the gate, entered, and came toward him.

"Miriam!" he cried, and sprung toward her.

"Yes, Frank, I am Miriam; but do not touch me, for I am not your Miriam now."

"Ah, Frank! I am a married woman!"

But for the agony in her face as she uttered the words, he would have spurned her.

She had been false, and when he came to claim his bride, she was wedded to another.

"Married?" he hoarsely whispered.

"Yes, but I did not marry of my own free will."

"Listen to me, Frank; hear what I have to say, and then let us part forever, you to go your way and feel in your heart the deep grief I must ever feel."

"I will hear you, madam," he said, coldly.

"You are angry, but I must tell you all."

"It was the work of my brother, who squandered our father's wealth and left us almost beggars."

"But he kept the secret from the world, though when poor father found it out he nearly died from the shock."

"There was but one way to retrieve our fortune and that was to sell me."

"Carter had gained a strange control over father, and told him that his losses in gambling had been paid by one man, who, if I would become his wife, would forgive the debt."

"If I refused, then disgrace must follow, my brother would go to prison, and even then he had so gotten hold of my father's estate and squandered it, that we would have little left, if anything."

"Carter implored, told me I was killing my father, and urged that I should marry this man, Gregory Vance, to whom he owed large sums, and who held proofs against him in certain forged papers."

"I had not heard from you, my father was dying, and I in my despair consented, and we were married."

"And the pledge you gave me broken?"

"Yes, but are there not palliating circumstances, Frank, for was I not driven to it?"

"Yes; and your father is dead?"

"Yes, he died a day after my marriage."

"And your brother?"

"Is in Boston, living a wild, dissipated life."

"And your husband?"

"Spends most of his time in the city also, leaving me here, I am glad to say, alone with the servants."

"And you are Mrs. Gregory Vance?" and there was a sneer in the voice of the man.

"I am, alas, Mrs. Gregory Vance, Frank."

"You know what that man did against my father?"

"I have heard that your father owed his loss of fortune to Gregory Vance."

"True, to his father and himself."

"They defrauded my father out of all, and before I sailed Gregory Vance taunted me one night in the tavern with daring to hope to win you and he said you would be his wife some day."

"I felled him for his words, and yet he kept his threat, it seems, and he has ruined your brother by getting him into his power."

"I do not blame you, Miriam, for you were so situated, with father dying, brother in dread of imprisonment and you had no one to call upon, so you were driven to what you did."

"But there must come a squaring of accounts between Gregory Vance and me."

"It shall come soon, for I will not submit to the deed he has done against you and me."

"Ah, Frank! what do your words mean?"

"Much that I cannot explain, Miriam; but why did you not go to my mother for advice?"

"Why, Frank, your mother?"

"Yes, Miriam."

"Can it be that you do not know that your mother is dead?"

The strong man started, bent his head and covered his face with his hands while he announced aloud:

"If I have sinned deeply, then cruel has been my punishment."

"Frank, your mother died a year after your departure."

"Tell me of her, Miriam," he said softly, and he uncovered his head with the respect that

swept over him as he remembered her whom he had so dearly loved.

"When you left you deposited in the house of True & Company some money for her, I believe."

"Yes, one thousand dollars, all I had."

"Well, Frank, the firm failed."

"Failed?"

"Yes, they owed Gregory Vance & Son largely and had to give up business, so your mother lost her money, and—"

"And the money I have since sent her, for I have written her each year sending in each letter a thousand dollars in exchange," he said quickly.

"Of that I know nothing, but—"

"I sent it to True & Company, the draft payable to them, but for my mother, and they must have received it."

"True & Company gave up all their business to Gregory Vance, and he has all in his hands, or rather had until, after his father's death, he being heir to all, sold out and now lives on the interest of his fortune."

"Then he has stolen my mother's money."

"Ah, Frank! it is my husband whom you call a thief."

"Curse your husband!"

"He is a thief, and— But tell me more of my poor mother, Miriam."

"She was almost broken-hearted at the loss of her money, and, being destitute, had to sell her little home here to live on the money, but she rented it, though, and continued to reside here."

"Who bought it?"

"Gregory Vance."

"Ah! do you know the price he paid?"

"Seven hundred dollars, I believe."

"And the place worth treble the sum; but go on, Miriam, with your story."

"Your mother began to fail rapidly, and, at last, a year after your departure, died."

"She is buried in the family lot, I suppose, up yonder on the hill?"

"Yes, and Frank, I have seen that her grave has not been neglected."

"But it is growing dark, Frank, and I must return, for my husband returns to-night from the city, and if he knew I was here with you he would kill me, I verily believe, for he hates you with all the bitterness of his heart."

"My poor little Miriam, I will not detain you, so good-by."

"Some day, mark my words, some day we will meet again."

"I have come back to keep my pledge, for I can match the sum your father named as your fortune dollar for dollar, and I could have made you happy as my wife, and given my mother a home of luxury in her last years."

"But I find you the wife of another, my worst foe, and I shall go far away from you again."

"Farewell, Miriam!"

He drew her toward him ere she could resist, and kissed her.

With a startled cry she fled from him, and he was alone in the home of his boyhood, alone with the memories of the past that haunted him, and the bitter sorrows of the present.

CHAPTER XXI.

HIDING A TREASURE.

FOR some moments after the departure of Miriam, Frank Bestor stood as motionless as a statue, gazing into space.

Then he started, glanced about him, and strode rapidly down into the village.

He wended his way to the shop of a locksmith and soon after started on his return for his home, accompanied by the workman.

He stopped in at a store and made some purchases, and then reaching the cottage, the locksmith soon opened the doors for him, and his luggage was moved within.

"So you are going to live in your old home again, Master Frank?" said the locksmith.

"Yes, Toby, for a short while."

"And you have bought it back from the rich Mr. Vance?"

"Not exactly, but I expect to do so, Toby."

The locksmith soon after took his departure, the windows and doors were thrown open for air, and the candles which Bestor had purchased were lighted.

The house remained just as it had been left by his mother.

But it had no longer the cheerful air it had worn then.

All seemed dark and gloomy.

Having made himself as comfortable as possible, Frank Bestor lighted his pipe and sat down upon the front porch to smoke and to think.

you will find that I have returned, and there shall come a day of reckoning for you.

"You stole my bride, persecuted my poor old mother, and put her in her grave, and I am as revengeful as a Spaniard."

He passed on, leaving the elegant home of the Westons on his right, and soon after reached the "village of the dead."

It was a lonely spot, situated upon the ridge overlooking the village of the living, and a view could be obtained far out to sea and up and down the coast.

In that graveyard rested three generations of Bestors, for the two grandfathers and father of the sailor were buried there, and also his mother.

He saw that there was a new tomb, one of marble, not stone, and it was in the shape of a cross.

The moonlight shone brightly down upon the sacred spot, and with uncovered head the man who had fought under a pirate flag, approached the grave.

He read on the marble cross the name of his mother, her time of birth and death, and then followed the line:

"HERE THERE IS REST."

He did not have to ask himself who it was that had kept the plot clear of weeds, and who had erected the marble cross to his mother's memory.

He knew that Miriam's had been the loving heart that had remembered the dead.

"And this woman has been stolen from me by my foe; he who robbed my father, is accountable for my mother's death, and now dwells in yonder lordly house as master, with the one who should have been, and at heart is, my wife."

"But bitter memories must not come to me here."

He stood for some minutes gazing down upon the graves about him, and then turned and retraced his steps slowly to his cottage home.

"I must bury my treasure, and the spot to place it I know well," he muttered, as he reached the cottage and entered it.

Soon he came out bearing a heavy box upon his shoulder.

He walked rapidly along the beach under the cliff to some distance, and placed the box upon a rock.

Then he continued on his way, a coil of stout rope hanging upon his arm, and by a steep pathway up the cliff, began to ascend to the top of the ridge.

Going along the cliff, he halted beneath a tree that grew near the edge, and making one end of the rope secure to it, threw over the other end.

Then he swung himself over with the recklessness of a sailor who cares not for dizzy heights, and went down hand over hand for some fifty feet.

Then he began to swing himself, as the cliff shelved under for some ten feet just there, until he got a footing upon a narrow shelf of rock.

Just there, wholly concealed from view, its presence suspected by no one, and known only to Frank Bestor, who had found it as a boy, when practicing climbing a rope hung over the cliff, was a cave.

Making the rope fast about some rocks, he again swung himself over and continued his descent to the beach.

"It is just long enough."

"I had not forgotten the distance," he said, as he tied the rope securely about the box resting on the rock.

This done, he went up hand over hand with the agility of a middy, and reaching the shelf of rock where was the cavern, drew the box slowly up after him.

Then he took a lantern that was swung to his belt, lighted it, and entered the cavern, bearing the box with him.

It was not very deep, and he had to stoop to go in, but he came to a projection of the rock upon which he placed his box, and could see that it was securely hidden there.

Then he retraced his way, unfastened the rope from about the rocks and ascended to the top of the cliff.

The rope was hauled up and coiled, and he went on back to his cottage, lighted his pipe and had just begun to smoke and muse, when suddenly he saw two forms approaching.

They entered the gate, approached the cottage and one of them said sternly:

"Well, sir, what does this outrage mean?"

"You are Gregory Vance, I believe?" was the quiet reply of the sailor.

"I am, sir."

"And you are Carter Weston?" and the sailor turned to the other of the two.

"That is my name, sir."

"Well, gentlemen, if I may so call you without reflecting upon those to whom the title properly belongs, I am Frank Bestor, a sailor of fortune," was the calm response of the returned wanderer.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WRONGED MAN.

"YOU are Frank Bestor, are you?" cried Gregory Vance angrily, and he stepped nearer to the young sailor.

"I am, sir, and wholly at your service."

"By what right do you dare come here and walk into my house?"

"I dare do much worse than that, Gregory Vance, as you will find out if you attempt to carry a high hand with me."

"This is my house, for it was my mother's, and to-morrow I shall force you to pay back the money I have sent her each year, and which, made payable to True and Company, you have made use of."

"You see that I know you, Gregory Vance, and I'll send you to prison as a thief."

"Ha! this to me, you infamous sea-dog?"

"Do you accuse me of stealing?"

"I do."

"And I accuse you of piracy on the high seas, for a man now in my employ recognized you on the deck of a buccaneer vessel that captured a ship he was mate of."

The moonlight prevented Gregory Vance and Carter Weston from seeing the look of pallor that came over the face of the sailor.

But he had served in a hard school the past few years, and he had learned to be calm under all circumstances, so he responded quietly, yet with a suppressed emotion that showed how deeply he felt.

"Gregory Vance, your last words shall make you answerable to me now for the wrongs done me in the past."

"I accuse you, with your dead father, of having ruined my father and appropriated his fortune."

"I accuse you of having stolen from me the woman who was pledged to become my wife, and in this you were aided by this man here, Carter Weston, who sold his sister to you for the debts he owed you, and proofs you held of sins he had been guilty of."

"You, Gregory Vance, robbed my mother and brought her to poverty, thus breaking her heart and causing her to die."

"For all these crimes I intended you should answer to me; but since your last words, accusing me of piracy, I tell you, Gregory Vance, you or I shall die this night."

"Hold! I am armed and have you both in my power if I wish to kill you."

"But no, you shall have the same chance that I have, and you can select swords or pistols, for I have both, and Carter Weston will act as a second to both of us."

"I will not lend my hand to murder," said Carter Weston, quickly, though through his brain flashed the hope that Gregory Vance would fall by the hand of the sailor, for this would relieve him of debt and place the whole fortune in the possession of his sister, whom he did not doubt he could manage so as to get a large share of it.

"You will have to do as I demand, Mr. Weston," returned Frank Bestor.

"Nor will I stand up and permit you to murder me, sir."

"If you wish to fight a duel it shall be properly conducted," Gregory Vance said.

"I wish to fight a duel, and it shall be properly conducted."

"Then send your second to me to-morrow."

"Oh, no, for I might find myself in jail, accused of piracy, before the morrow."

"Do you doubt me?"

"Certainly, for I have had reason to do so."

"I will not meet you to-night."

"You refuse?"

"I do, most decidedly!"

"You who have prided yourself upon being a dead shot, who can teach swordsmanship to masters of the weapon, it is said, are now too cowardly to meet a poor sailor whom you have wronged shamefully and cruelly?"

"Enough, Frank Bestor, I will meet you," cried Gregory Vance, excitedly.

"This man is not alone here, Gregory, for he would not have played the bold game he has in breaking into your house, were he not backed up by some of his comrades," said Carter Weston.

"I am alone, sir, and you are two; but I have no second, and will meet Mr. Vance to-night."

"Why will not to-morrow do?" said Vance, anxious to postpone the meeting for various reasons.

"Because to-morrow you would have me arrested under charges your hirelings would trump up against me, and the law might not be just when the scales weigh a poor sailor in one side, a rich aristocrat in the other."

"No, sir, I give you the chance to fight me."

"If you refuse, then I shall act to suit myself."

"I am ready then."

"With what weapons do you wish to meet me?"

"Either will please me, swords or pistols."

"Let us say swords then, for I have an excellent pair of rapiers here, and they are not so noisy as pistols."

"Swords be it then."

"Mr. Weston, on the mantle in yonder room, you will find a roll of weapons; will you kindly fetch them out here?"

"Why not get them yourself?" was the haughty reply of Carter Weston.

"Because I have not the confidence in the

courage of Mr. Gregory Vance that I could wish.

"He might run off."

"Insulter! devil! I will kill you for those words," and the man trembled with rage.

Frank Bestor was perfectly calm, and replied:

"If you can you are welcome; but I shall endeavor to prevent your taking my life."

"Will you do as I ask, Mr. Weston?"

Carter Weston did not wish to see the fight fall through.

He had his own hopes of its termination, and he was anxious to see it come off and the consequences meet his anticipations.

So he said:

"I will get the weapons, and my fine fellow, you will soon regret having forced Gregory Vance into a duel."

"Perhaps," was the taunting reply.

Carter Weston entered the cottage and took up the bundle of weapons, which the sailor had brought with him.

He found a cimeter, a cutlass, both of the finest workmanship, and a pair of rapiers, most superior blades and perfectly matched.

He took the two last and handed them to Gregory Vance.

The latter took first one, then the other, and tried them, in temper and weight, and said:

"These are as fine blades as I ever saw."

"I am ready, sir."

"And so am I," and the sailor threw off his coat, bared his arm and stepped out into the little walk that led to the cottage, while he said:

"Mr. Weston, kindly examine both of these swords and see that there is no advantage to either man, in their use, and then give the word for the duel to begin."

"Is this satisfactory, Mr. Vance?"

"It is, sir."

"And you intend it shall be a duel to the death?"

"I do."

"As you please, sir."

"Mr. Weston, I am ready," and the sailor stepped to a position, sword in hand.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DUEL WITH RAPIERS.

IT was evident that Gregory Vance had no fear of the result.

He was a sporting character, and from boyhood had been fond of athletic pursuits.

A fine rider, he was also a fair sailor, and also a huntsman, so that, keeping up the three means of pleasure he had his muscles in perfect trim all the time and was considered a man of great power and endurance.

Then he had excelled as a swordsman and shot, and never having met his equal with either weapon, it had made him overbearing and given to saying what he pleased to those who dared not resent an insult that could end but one way where their foe was such an invincible one.

He had never forgiven the blow he had received from Frank Bestor before he left home, and he felt another reason for hating him in that his father and himself had certainly robbed the father and mother of the sailor, and thus kept him from inheriting a fortune.

To kill Frank Bestor would be to hide certain ugly transactions, and kill him he intended to do.

He had known of the pledge given Bestor by the elder Weston, as to his daughter's one day becoming his wife, and he knew also that though Miriam had married him she loved Frank.

With these thoughts in his brain, Gregory Vance held no mercy for the man he was to meet in deadly combat.

The moon shone brightly down upon the scene and the gravel walk was chosen for the duel.

The two men were placed by Carter Weston with the moon upon one side, so that neither would have the advantage of light.

Then Carter Weston said:

"Are you ready?"

Both responded in the affirmative, and he dropped his hat as the signal to cross their weapons.

The blades came together with a vicious ring, after a hasty salute had been given, and quick as a flash Gregory Vance lunged for the heart of his antagonist.

The point of his weapon was turned aside with marvelous coolness and skill and Gregory Vance had just time to parry a thrust that well-nigh cost him his life.

Carter Weston was also a good swordsman and he saw at once that the sailor knew what he was about.

His spirits rose, for he had feared that he would be no match for his brother-in-law.

And Gregory Vance saw with regret that he had a dangerous man to deal with, and he must be cautious.

He was cautious from that instant, but it soon became an act of defense on his part, for try as he might he could not get within the guard of his enemy, and more, he found that he could only defend himself.

"The man is a wonder," he hissed, and these were the last words he ever uttered, for the

blade of the sailor was driven almost to the hilt in his heart.

"Great God!"

The cry came from Carter Weston, who suddenly realized what had been done.

"You have killed him," he said, hoarsely, as he bent over him.

"I have done for him just what he would have done for me."

"You will swing for this, my fine fellow, for laws have changed in this community since you went to sea, and dueling is regarded as murder."

"Ah! say you so?"

"It is true."

"What if Vance had killed me?"

"Ah, then it would have been a case of self-defense, you know, for you had taken forcible possession of his property, attacked him, and of course it would be as we could have said."

"I see, and what a pity for you that it did not so come out."

"But I have won the game, Mr. Carter Weston, and I do not intend to hang for it."

"I would like to know how you can prevent?"

"I will show you."

"You are my prisoner!"

Quick as a flash he had drawn a pistol with his words, and covered Carter Weston, who started back with a cry of horror.

"March into that house, sir, or you are a dead man."

The order was obeyed, for Carter Weston was wholly cowed by the man who had just taken the life of his brother-in-law, whose body lay before his eyes as a reminder of what might be his fate.

Taking the rope he had used at the cliff to draw up his treasure-box, Frank Bestor proceeded to tie his prisoner most securely.

Being a sailor, he understood how to tie a knot, and soon had the young man securely bound, hands and feet.

Then he tied a scarf over his mouth, as a gag, and placed him in a chair.

"I mean you no harm, sir, unless you force me to it."

"I will soon return."

He went out, and taking up the body of Gregory Vance, placed it in an inner room.

Then he wiped off his sword and tied it up with the other in the bundle, after which he strolled away toward the village.

The cottage stood off to itself, the nearest to the cliff and nearly the eighth of a mile from any other house, the road leading only to it.

Along this the sailor strode, and he was soon in the little town.

He knew it well, in spite of the improvements and changes that had taken place since his departure years before, and he wended his way to a tavern on the shore which he knew was a sailor's resort.

The landlord, a bluff-looking man, who had once been a seaman himself, was behind the bar, and going up to him, he said:

"Mate, I wish to charter a snug craft for a run to Boston and back, and one that can sail like a witch, and has a small crew."

"Have you such a craft?"

The landlord looked at the speaker with the air of one who thought he recognized an old friend, but could not exactly place him.

"Yes, I can get you such a craft, mate, for the Ripple is in port, and she's a good one of thirty tons, with a skipper and four in crew counting the cabin-boy and cook."

"But hain't we met before?"

"We may have; but I wish the boat at once."

"Well, what do you pay?"

"What is the price you want?"

"To Boston?"

"Yes."

"Stay long?"

"Not an hour."

"Fifty dollars."

"I'll pay it, and here's the money."

"Have her anchor off the cliff as soon as you can."

"I'll board her there," and Frank Bestor left the tavern.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FUGITIVE.

THE landlord of the Full Sail Tavern was a keen one, knowing just how to turn a penny, whether it was an honest one or not.

He was called "captain" from having been a sailor, though he had never risen beyond the rank of quartermaster, and had become a tavern-keeper from having married the daughter of a landlord.

He had run off with the girl, and her father, having other views for her, had sworn never to forgive her, and to cut her off without a dollar; but he died suddenly one day, before he made his will, and the daughter and her sailor lover returned and took charge of the tavern, and the "captain" had prospered in many ways, but had grown no better as he grew older.

"Calvin," he called out to an old sea dog who sat at a table in the room.

"Well?" and the man called advanced to the bar.

"Take a drink."

It was seldom that the captain treated, and

Captain Calvin of the schooner Ripple hastened to accept, fearing that there was some mistake.

"I've got a friend as wants to run down to Boston to-night, so I just told him I'd send him in the Ripple, and would ask him thirty dollars for the trip."

"Didn't I do well?"

"Yes, you did, for I'd have gone for twenty these hard times," replied Skipper Calvin.

"Well, he paid me, so here's your money, thirty dollars, so don't worry him with no talk about it."

"I won't; but I'll stand treat on this, captain."

"All right, some other time; but he wants to go at once, so get aboard and run down off the cliff and drop anchor."

"I think he's a Boston chap as is courtin' one o' ther merchant's daughters as lives up on the ridge."

"All right, I'll get away at once."

"But will I send a boat ashore?"

"Yes, and he'll hail you from the land."

Skipper Calvin at once dashed off his glass of grog and left the tavern, while the captain chuckled at the way in which he had made twenty dollars and then growled that he had not added five more to it.

The Ripple lay at anchor off-shore, and a trim craft she was, and built to go fast and stand heavy weather as well.

The skipper was soon on board, his crew aroused and the Ripple, under easy sail, stood down the harbor for the cliff.

In the mean time, Frank Bestor had left the tavern and made his way to the locksmith's who had gone with him to open the cottage for him.

The locksmith was just about closing up his shop, for it was growing late, when the sailor appeared.

"Toby, it would be best for you not to speak of seeing me, or having done any work for me, as it might get you into trouble, knowing the cottage was not mine," said Bestor.

"All right, cap'n, I'll keep dark about it, and thank you too for the hint," replied Toby, and Bestor continued on his way to the cottage.

He found Carter Weston seated in the chair, as he had left him, and he quickly said:

"Mr. Weston, I shall now release you, sir, or rather leave you to untie yourself, for while you are doing so, I can be attending to a little matter I have in hand."

Then the sailor went into the room where he had left his traps and carried them to the beach under the cliff.

Here he left them, after several trips, and returning to the cottage took up the body of Gregory Vance and placed it in the yard where the duel had been fought.

Then he raised Carter Weston in his arms as though he had been a child, and seated him upon the steps of the cottage.

Closing the doors and locking them with the keys obtained from Toby the locksmith, he left all as he had found it and then approached Carter Weston.

"I will release this hand, Mr. Weston, and in time you can untie the knots that bind you and be free; but you'll find it fully a couple of hours' work, I assure you."

"Then go to your home and spread the news how I murdered your father-in-law, Gregory Vance, and set the hounds of the law upon me."

"Good-night, sir."

He walked out of the gate, turning toward the village, to deceive the prisoner; but then dodged under the bank toward the cliff.

The Ripple had just dropped anchor as he reached the spot where he had left his luggage, and he knew that she could not be seen from the cottage.

"Ripple ahoy!" he called out.

"Ahoy!" responded Skipper Calvin, and a boat came ashore.

The luggage was put in, Frank Bestor followed, and five minutes after the Ripple was heading out to sea.

Once clear of the land a spanking breeze was blowing, and Skipper Calvin was about to shape his course for Boston, when Frank Bestor said calmly:

"New York is my destination please, skipper."

"New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"The captain said you wanted to go to Boston."

"I have changed my mind, that is all."

"I'd not run there for no thirty dollars, sir, had I know'd it."

"I paid the landlord fifty dollars, his price, and would have paid more had he asked it."

"You paid him fifty?" cried the surprised skipper.

"Yes."

"He said thirty."

"He simply charged a fee for chartering your vessel, that is all; but I'll give you fifty more to put me in New York."

"I'll do it, sir, for you are a gentleman."

"And I can make it ten apiece for your crew and fifty more for you, if you can forget where you took me—do you see?"

The skipper was amazed, but also delighted,

and the crew were called up one by one, and a ten-dollar gold-piece put in their hands with the remark:

"I do not care to have it known, my lad, which way I sailed on leaving port, so see if this won't keep your tongue still."

The skipper then got his pay, and with the belief that he had gotten a prince in disguise on board as a passenger, he headed for New York.

"Maybe he's a pirit," suggested the cook, and this opinion was accepted as the right one in the forecastle, and the cook can be set down as having come pretty near the truth in his surmise.

The Ripple made a good run down the Sound to New York, arriving late the following night, and the strange passenger left the vessel there, going no one knew where.

The next morning early his luggage was sent for, but the man who came for it could tell Skipper Calvin nothing about the gentleman he served.

Finding a chance to charter for a liberal sum to Cuba, Skipper Calvin did so, and the Ripple set sail for Havana, drawn by one of those mysterious circumstances that so often shape our lives in one direction, when, had she returned at once to the port from whence she sailed, the crew might have given evidence of a nature that would have saved much misery to others.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STORY OF THE DUEL.

As Frank Bestor had told him, Carter Weston found it no easy task to untie the knots he had made.

He had the idea that Frank Bestor had gone to the village.

He really liked the man, and knew well that he owed to him his life, as his sister did.

But he was acting wholly in all that he had done to cover up the guilty tracks he had left in getting money to squander and gamble away.

He did not regard it wrong to crush others if he could save himself, and so he had acted against Bestor in urging his sister Miriam to marry Gregory Vance.

The latter had loaned him large sums of money, or forged notes of his, Carter's, father, and had, when they came due and could not be met, found out the secret.

Judge Weston had paid the notes, but it had cramped him greatly, and it gave a shock to his pride and honor that he never recovered from.

What he had left he had given to his daughter, excepting to leave Carter free of debt, and with a small sum of money to start in business with.

Carter Weston had invested the money at the gaming-table, and from his father's death had become a professional gambler.

He was generally lucky, but also lost heavily at times, and then he would call upon Gregory Vance for aid.

Vance always helped him, from some reason that Carter Weston could not comprehend, and at the time of the duel he owed his brother-in-law a large sum of money.

With her own inheritance, which her father had saved for her, and the large fortune of her husband, Miriam would be, as Carter knew, a very rich woman.

She had no children, and all would be hers.

In spite of his sinful life, Miriam loved her brother, though she could not forgive his having, by his acts, forced her to become the wife of Gregory Vance.

She, however, had not again referred to it, and a truce had existed between the two since Miriam's marriage, and at times, unloving her husband, and alone as it were, she had been really affectionate toward him.

Owing Gregory Vance as he did, and with his sister a widow and vastly rich, he being the one she would naturally look to, were the reasons that Carter Weston wished to see the duel fought for, and more, hoped that it would end in the death of his brother-in-law.

The duel had met his anticipations, and he was therefore, as he believed, free of his pecuniary debt to Gregory Vance.

There lay the dead body of the man before him, and he shuddered as he saw the seemingly sightless eyes fixed upon him in the moonlight.

Where Frank Bestor had gone he did not know, and wondered at it that he had not attempted to make his escape.

"He loves Miriam yet; but can it be possible that he hopes yet to marry her after taking the life of her husband?

"No, no, Miriam never would marry him now though she loves him ever so dearly, and that she does do so I am sure."

Then he tugged away at the sailor knots once more, and cursed Bestor for having tied them so tightly.

"It will be midnight before I can get away, and those eyes seem to be watching me as I work, as though holding me guilty of his death."

"But what about Bestor?"

"I wish he had escaped, for when I tell my story he will be arrested, and it will go hard with him, I fear."

And so he tugged on at his bonds until at last the knots were untied and he rose to his feet a free man.

Instantly he started for the mansion, going by way of the cliff path.

It was midnight when he reached there, and he saw his sister seated on the piazza in the moonlight.

She had met her husband and brother on their return from Boston, had supper with them and then gone to her room.

But she could not rest there, after the scene she had gone through with Frank Bestor, and so she went down-stairs again.

The butler told her that her brother and husband had gone to the village.

"Which way did they go?" she quickly asked.

"Down by the highway, ma'm."

Miriam gave a sigh of relief, for the shorter way would have been down the cliff path by the cottage of the Widow Bestor.

But as they passed along the highway the quick eyes of Gregory Vance had caught a twinkling light in the cottage window and so they had gone thither.

And Miriam, unable to sleep, had sought the piazza to pace to and fro in the moonlight.

Time passed, but she still remained on the piazza, and at last saw a form approaching.

It was her brother, and as he ascended the steps she asked quickly:

"Where is Mr. Vance, Carter?"

She had never called her husband by any other name, and though he came and went as he pleased, unquestioned by her, and his movements in fact being of perfect indifference to her, on this night she felt a dread at her heart that caused her to ask the question.

"Miriam, I am glad that I found you up, for I have something to tell you."

"Well, Carter?" she replied, with forced calmness.

"Frank Bestor has returned."

"Have you met him?" she quickly asked.

"Yes."

"And Mr. Vance?"

"Met him too."

"Where?"

"We saw a light in the cottage, and going there found some one on the piazza smoking."

"It was Frank Bestor?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Gregory asked him how dare he break into his house, words followed, and Bestor insulted Greg, and a duel followed with rapiers."

"My God! and the result?" and Miriam spoke in a whisper.

"As fine a swordsman as Greg was, Bestor ran him through the heart."

The woman bent her head and gave a low moan.

Was it grief for the dead or for the living? Who can tell?"

"Don't fret, Miriam, for if Gregory is dead, he leaves you a very rich widow."

"Silence! how dare you speak of riches at such a time, Carter Weston."

"Your brother-in-law is dead, you say?"

"Yes."

"My husband?"

"Yes, he lies dead at the cottage, where I left him half an hour ago."

The woman had risen to her feet, and she stood before her brother, her face white, her form quivering, and her eyes filled with a strange expression.

"What is to be done, Miriam?" asked the man, yielding to the stronger spirit which the woman possessed.

"Where is Frank Bestor?"

"In the village, I guess."

"What did he say about his act?"

"Oh, it was a square duel, Miriam."

"Did he say he would remain here?"

"He did not say."

"If he does he is lost."

"He'll hang as sure as—"

"He shall not be hanged, though the law will have it so if he is arrested."

"He must at once depart, Carter."

"He cannot be found."

"Go to the cottage for him."

"I?"

"Yes."

"I would not go there for a cool thousand again, not where Gregory Vance is."

"Coward! I will go, and you go to the village."

"If I find him I will bid him fly for his life."

"If you find him tell him that he must go, or he will be hanged."

"But where am I to find him?"

"If he is not at his cottage he is in the village, and there are but two taverns there."

"Go to both of them."

"Then come back by the cottage for me, and if either of us have found him, you can go back to the village and give a report of the affair."

"But, Miriam, it will keep me up all night, so why cannot you send a servant?"

"Carter Weston, you are as selfish a man as I ever knew could exist."

"If Gregory Vance is dead, I am, as you said, a very rich widow, and you are penniless, only owing my late husband a large sum."

"You will wish to be released from that loan, and more, you will need some pecuniary favors, and I will be deaf to all entreaties."

"You understand—will you go?"

"Yes," and he moved with alacrity, proving that what he did was from selfish motives alone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM.

THE young sailor was, of course, not found in the village at either of the taverns, as the reader can understand, having seen him set sail in the Ripple.

So Carter Weston turned his steps back toward the cottage, whither his visitor had gone alone, a thing he would not have done after having once left there with the eyes of Gregory Vance haunting him.

The heart of Miriam felt no fear.

She had told Gregory Vance that she did not love him, that she had sold herself to him to save her father from poverty in his latter days, and her brother from prison.

She had been a true wife, if not a loving one, and she had devoted her life to at least making the home of her husband a comfortable one.

She had nothing to reproach herself for, and she went to the cottage fearlessly and alone.

She entered the little gate, and her gaze fell upon the form of her husband lying upon the grassy sward by the side of the gravel path.

She shuddered, but approached and knelt by the side of the body.

The cottage was closed, and all was dark within it, as her brother had said, so Frank Bestor she knew had gone.

She placed her hand upon the cold forehead, and then felt for the pulse with her finger-tips.

"He is dead."

"How uncertain is life."

So she murmured, and yet she felt only as she might have done had the man been no more than a stranger to her.

From their wedding-day, coldness had existed between them, while from his lips had fallen many a sneer, many a cruel remark against her absent lover.

She felt only regret at the tragedy, deep sorrow that her husband had fallen by the hands of her lover, and no grief at his death.

She paced to and fro in the gravel walk until she saw a form approaching along the path leading to the cottage.

It was her brother, and he came along as though he feared he would find the test too severe, and that she had gone back to the mansion.

She saw his hesitating manner and a smile of scorn curled her lips.

"Carter!"

"Yes, Miriam, you are there?"

"I said that I would await you here."

"But I thought you might have gone."

"Did you find Frank Bestor?"

"No!"

"You went to the two taverns?"

"I did."

"He was at neither?"

"No."

"When does the stage leave?"

"At midnight it left."

"Then he went by that."

"Doubtless, so has escaped."

"Heaven grant it."

"Now what is to be done, Miriam?"

"I will go home and you return to the village, seek Lawyer Scott and tell him what has happened."

"He will advise you as to what is best."

"You can send the sexton for the body and I will have all ready to receive it."

With this she returned to the mansion, and Carter, cursing his ill-luck at having so much trouble on his hands, went back to the village.

Lawyer Scott, the attorney of Gregory Vance, was aroused from sleep and came down to see his visitor.

He heard the story of the young gambler with great surprise, and his face became serious as he listened.

"Now where is this man Bestor, Carter?" he asked.

"I do not know, sir."

"You must know, you must find him, for if you do not it will look bad for you, I fear."

"Bad for me?" cried Carter Weston with horror.

"So I said; but now let me put on my coat and we will go to the constable and put him on the track of Bestor."

"Then we will seek the coroner and sexton and go after the body."

"I tell you, Carter, this is a very serious matter, I can assure you," and the manner of the lawyer fairly frightened the gambler.

The constable, coroner and sexton were found, and while the officers of the law set out to find Frank Bestor, the others went to seek the body of his victim, as he was called.

The night passed away, and a permit had been given to remove the body of the rich man to his elegant home.

Not a trace of the murderer, as Bestor was called, could be found, or any one who had seen him.

It was true that a strange brig had been seen to head in toward the harbor, anchor and send a boat ashore.

But there was a large, ice-cold spring of purest

water under the cliff, known to many skippers who were wont to fill their casks there, and those who saw the strange vessel said they supposed that she was getting water there.

The coroner's jury knew not what to decide, and after hearing all the evidence that could be given, found that the lawyer was right in saying that it would look bad for Carter Weston could Frank Bestor not be found.

In the whole village Carter Weston had not a friend.

He had been overbearing, proud and disagreeable in his treatment of all.

It had leaked out in some way that he had ruined the judge, his father, who was very popular, though an austere man.

Then too it was known that Gregory Vance had it in his power to send him to prison, and more, that he owed him large sums.

Furthermore it was known that the two men were not on the best of terms, though brothers-in-law, and that Carter Weston had sacrificed his sister in her marriage to Gregory Vance was common talk.

With these facts in view, and strong circumstantial evidence to back them up, added to suspicions, the coroner's jury, which twice adjourned, rendered the verdict that Carter Weston had killed his brother-in-law, Gregory Vance, and manufactured the story about the coming of Frank Bestor to the port.

The landlord of the Full Sail had nothing to say upon the subject of his visitor who had chartered the Ripple, and Toby the locksmith kept dumb about what he had done, especially urged to do so by an intense hatred he felt against Carter Weston.

As the Ripple was away, nothing could be learned regarding her leaving port, and no one connected her departure with the flight of the alleged murderer of Gregory Vance.

So it was that when Carter Weston returned to the home which he now regarded as his own, a constable followed him and he was arrested as the murderer of his brother-in-law, Gregory Vance.

The arrest of her brother was a great shock to Miriam, but she felt that when the trial took place her testimony would clear him.

After several months of wretchedness in jail, Carter Weston was brought for trial before a jury of his peers.

The trial opened, and Miriam's testimony was heard, yet no one in the jury-box believed it.

It was known that she loved her brother dearly, and yet all believed that her testimony was only given to save him from the gallows, and that Frank Bestor had not returned to his old home.

Toby the locksmith, vicious in his nature where aggrieved, kept silent, and when the Ripple returned, outside of her crew having been paid to keep silent, the men were anxious to do so, fearing to be arrested for having aided in the escape of a murderer.

Thus had Frank Bestor gained a double revenge, though he had not intended it, for the man who had stolen from him his intended bride had fallen by his hand, and the brother who had forced his sister to marry Gregory Vance had been accused of murder, convicted and sentenced to die on the gallows.

And in her splendid home sat the beautiful young widow, wondering in her heart if Frank Bestor, the man she loved above all else in the world, had purposely struck this double blow of revenge.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DON JUAN MORO BECOMES SOCIALE.

HAVING shown what the early life of Frank Bestor the buccaneer lieutenant had been, his misfortunes, griefs and hopes, and that his disappointment and revenge had made him again a wanderer, it is time to return to the shores of the Mexican Gulf, where dwelt other characters of my story.

Don Juan Moro, the new master of Castle Moro, was not very long in making acquaintances, though that he won friends was doubtful.

There was something about the man that was mysterious, people thought.

He was strikingly handsome, had a distinguished air, and his long hair and beard made him appear older than he was.

His accent and features indicated foreign birth, and yet in speaking English, when he wished to be he was a very brilliant conversationalist.

He lived in the greatest luxury, and servants were ever at his beck and call.

Never did he go out but that a huge African slave attended him.

The black was gorgeously dressed and went around with a cimeter, while other weapons were partially concealed in his silk sash.

He knew not a word of English, and only spoke to his master, whom he seemed to idolize, in

wealth and gotten the savage crew of his beautiful yacht.

The Don, after the neighboring planters had welcomed him to the neighborhood, returned each call, driving around in his stylish carriage with postillions and four horses, and remaining but a few minutes at each place save Belle Eden.

There he had remained half an hour, and had accepted an invitation to dine on the following Sunday at the hospitable board of Gaston Grayhurst.

Mrs. Grayhurst's sad and beautiful face seemed to win his sympathy, and when he addressed her, it was in a tone of subdued gentleness and marked respect.

He quite won little Estelle's heart, and when he departed he certainly left a good impression behind.

The next day Mrs. Grayhurst received a handsome souvenir of his visit in the shape of a rare and costly shawl of Persian manufacture, while to Estelle was sent a necklace of pearls of great beauty.

To Mr. Grayhurst the Don gave a pair of rapiers of superb workmanship.

To refuse the presents Gaston Grayhurst and his wife dare not, and yet it pained them to be the recipients of such costly gifts from a stranger.

"He is a foreigner, my dear, has lived in Eastern lands where such gifts are common, and we would mortally offend him to refuse," said Mr. Grayhurst.

So the presents were accepted, and Mrs. Grayhurst, Estelle and the planter drove over to Castle Moro to thank in person the generous donor.

He received them with courtly grace, had wine and refreshments served, showed them over the grand mansion and ended by sailing them home in the Sea Shell with her savage crew.

A week after Don Juan gave a grand ball, and for grandeur and lavish hospitality, even the aristocratic dwellers upon the coast had never seen anything to compare with it.

The Don fairly blazed with diamonds, and his Mexican suit was most gorgeous and becoming.

Though courtly and hospitable to all, there was a manner about the Don that was a barrier to all familiarity.

The only ones with whom this barrier was broken through in the slightest degree were the Grayhursts.

To them he seemed most attentive, and he petted little Estelle, and soon won her heart completely.

Driving home from Castle Moro after midnight, Mrs. Grayhurst said to her husband:

"Do you know, Gaston, I cannot rid myself of the idea that somewhere before I have met Don Juan?"

"The same feeling pervades me, Belle, and has ever since our first meeting."

"But where it was I cannot say, and as he does not recall it I must be mistaken."

"I am sure that I am not mistaken, for I have met him, but when and where is the question I cannot answer."

"I only wish I could recall him."

"You must be, like myself, mistaken, my dear; or perhaps you may have met him when you were on the stage, and he not recall you either, not expecting to meet you here in America as the wife of a Southern planter."

"It may be so, and I'd give much to remember all about him, for nothing could convince me that I had not met him," said Mrs. Grayhurst firmly.

Thus time passed on along the Gulf shores, and the Don became more and more popular, yet the mystery regarding him no one could clear up.

He carried out parties for a short cruise in his yacht, and they noted that the black crew obeyed every sign as an order, knew just what to do, and kept their eyes constantly upon their master, to whom they alone addressed a word, and then only when occasion demanded.

Though most hospitable, and himself accepting invitations to the various plantation homes, the Don was intimate with no one, unless it might be the Grayhursts.

At Belle Eden he dropped in at his pleasure, and drawn toward the man from some reason he could not fathom, Gaston Grayhurst often visited at Castle Moro and passed hours in the company of his hospitable and entertaining host.

The grief for the loss of her son gradually softened with time in the heart of Mrs. Grayhurst, and, as time passed on, she became more and more beautiful, if possible, both in face and form.

Estelle was growing into a lovely girl, and certainly was a great pet of the Don, who made her the recipient of many presents.

One month it was a pony, saddle and bridle, and the next a little vehicle he had made for her to drive a pair of Shetland ponies to.

Then it was a tiny boat for her to learn to row in, and next a miniature house and extensive assortment of toys.

Now and then he gave her jewelry, and both her father and mother wondered at its rare

beauty, while the souvenirs seemed always to be some treasure of a past age, an heirloom among the Moros, perhaps.

To urge against these extravagant gifts to Estelle, was to offend the Don, and so he was permitted to have his way, especially as he had not, since giving the shawl to Mrs. Grayhurst and the rapiers to the planter, offered anything more to them.

He seemed to feel that he had a right to devote his gifts to little Estelle, and yet to no one else in the neighborhood did he give anything.

Thus matters stood a year after the coming of the Don to Castle Moro, when a circumstance occurred that startled the community out of its accustomed routine of quietude.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE HORSEMAN.

ALONG the coast road, bordering the beautiful Bay St. Louis, a horseman was riding one afternoon, evidently enjoying the scenery spread before him.

The winding beach, looking like a silver belt encircling the shores, bordered with dark-green live-oak trees, stately pines and noble magnolias, here and there broken where a white villa was visible, or the spreading fields of some plantation running far back from the road.

On the other side was the beautiful bay across which could be seen the shores of Pass Christian, and beyond the low island chain that divided the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico from the Mississippi Sound.

The horseman was a man of no ordinary appearance, and rode like one who was well used to the saddle.

He was well-dressed, but travel stained as from a long journey.

He was well-mounted, and had thrown over his saddle a pair of leather saddle-bags in which was evidently the traps of a traveler.

Soon there came into view the elegant mansion of Castle Moro.

The horseman gazed upon it with deepest interest, halting his horse and seeming to take in the whole place, the villa, ornamental grounds, out-buildings, with the quarters of the slaves in the far distance, the white cabins forming a pleasing contrast against the dark-green background of the forest.

In the little haven lay at anchor the Sea Shell, her savage crew lying idly about the decks, as they patiently awaited the will of their master.

For a long time did the horseman sit on his horse regarding the scene, and then he rode into the massive gateway and halted at the stone steps that led up to the mansion.

A slave came to take his horse, and the liveried butler informed him that his master was away from home, dining at Belle Eden with Planter Grayhurst, but would return soon after nightfall.

"Would the gentleman enter and await the coming of his master, Don Juan?" asked the butler.

"Don Juan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is not this the home of Monsieur Belgarde?"

"Oh, no, sir; it was once the home of Monsieur Belgarde; but he had gone away, and his master, Don Juan Moro, now owned the estate.

"Was it the Monsieur Belgarde that the gentleman wished to see?"

"Yes, but I think I know your master also, so will await his coming," was the reply.

So the stranger's horse was led away to the stables, and the visitor was ushered into a most luxuriously furnished room to tidy up after his long ride.

Greatly refreshed he entered the library, and the first thing his eyes fell upon was a large portrait of Don Juan.

It had been painted but a short while before by a well known artist in New Orleans, who had prevailed upon the Don to sit for it.

"It is he," said the stranger, after glancing at the portrait for a minute.

Then he walked about the room, looking at various things that seemed of interest to him, and was so occupied when the butler called him to dinner.

The meal was served with great dignity by the butler, who opened some rare old wine and did the hospitable entertaining most grandly in the absence of his master.

It was dark before the meal was over, and the stranger seemed to care not to hurry through, but ate with a relish the tempting dishes set before him, while he sipped his wine with the air of a man who knew its worth.

After dinner the stranger went to the library and lit a cigar, and throwing himself down in an easy-chair began to think, and, from the expression on his face his thoughts were not unpleasant.

Gradually the blue smoke of his cigar ceased to curl upward, and the fire went out.

The musings of the stranger seemed to change into dreams, for his eyes closed in sleep.

For a long time he sat thus, sleeping and dreaming away the time, all unconscious of the rolling of wheels over the gravel drive up to the mansion door, and the coming of the Don.

"A strange gentleman is here, sir, to see you;

but he asked for Monsieur Belgarde," said the butler, as the Don reached the piazza.

"Indeed! he asked for Monsieur Belgarde?" said the Don, and he spoke like one who liked not what he heard.

"Yes, sir."

"A gentleman, you say?"

"Yes, master."

"Well dressed?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and he came on horseback."

"On horseback?"

"Yes, master."

"Where from?"

"From the way of the city, sir."

"Ah, from New Orleans?"

"Yes, master."

"And you kept him here?"

"Yes, master, for he said that he knew you too."

"Knew me, and knew Monsieur Belgarde?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is strange."

"I asked him to await your return, sir, and showed him the hospitalities of your house, master, as you have directed me to do."

"That was right; but if you saw him eat his dinner you can certainly judge as to whether he was a gentleman, or one playing the part of one."

"He's a real gentleman, sir."

"Where is he?"

"In the library smoking, master."

"I will see him."

But before going into the library the Don went to his own room and slipped something into the breast of his coat.

It was a pistol, and with his right hand resting upon the weapon he opened the library door and stepped within.

There sat the stranger fast asleep still in the easy-chair where he had thrown himself to smoke.

The Don started back at sight of him, his face turned pale and he slowly drew the pistol from his pocket.

From the expression of his face it seemed as though he meant to use it, while from his lips came the words:

"Why has he tracked me here?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRACKED.

WITH a shake of his head the Don returned the pistol to his pocket, stepped back slowly toward the door, and then advanced as though just having entered the room.

His step caused the stranger to open his eyes, and he rose quickly to his feet.

"Don Juan Moro," he said, with a smile.

"Yes, we meet again, but may I ask by what name I am to address you?"

"I have not changed my name, Don Juan, as you have."

"Then I would ask why we meet again, and you thus break our compact?"

"I have come to see you, Don, because you have broken your compact."

"I? In what way, pray?"

"Let us talk the matter over quietly, Don, and do not get excited."

"I believed we had parted forever."

"But you see it is not so."

"Sit down, please, and I will do the same, though you do not ask it."

The Don looked angry.

Then he said:

"Well, it's no use, Bestor, being angry with you, for I owe too much to you in the past, and we have been too true friends."

"But I had hoped to forever hide my identity from every one, even yourself, and it was our compact to go our separate ways, never to meet again."

"True."

"Well, sit down and we will talk over matters, and you can tell me why you are here."

"I will tell you that my fortune, won by piracy and in the slave-trade, served me not as I had hoped, for one with whom I had hoped to share it was lost to me forever."

"Dead?"

"Worse—married!"

"Ah!"

"Women are ever false, Bestor."

"No, no, do not say that, for she was not false, as she was forced to marry one she did not love."

"I never trust women, Bestor."

"Then you wrong them, and show ignorance of their noble nature."

"You are eloquent in their defense," said the Don, with a sneer.

"I am but truthful."

"Well, what after you found your lady-love false?"

"Not false, but lost to me by her marriage with another."

"Just as bad; but why did you not kill her husband and then marry her?"

"I was avenged."

"Ah! you did kill him?"

"Yes, I ran him through the heart in a duel; but I became a fugitive afterward, and was on my way to New Orleans to discover what the future had in store for me, when I picked up a

paper and read a slip that was partly torn, so that I could not see the name."

"What was it?"

"It spoke of the Castle Moro having been superbly fitted up by its new master, who enjoyed as a toy a beautiful yacht manned by a crew of savage blacks."

"I knew that you had not sold Castle Moro, though you had told me you had, and more, this crew of blacks for an armed yacht smacked of you, so I concluded that for some reason you had come back here."

"What if I had?"

"If you remember I was the one who kidnapped for you that splendid boy."

"Acting under my orders."

"So be it, I did so all the same, and after his sad fate in Africa, my conscience never ceased to make me feel the act."

"So, when we parted, after dividing spoils, I asked you to promise not to strike at the parents of that boy further, and you agreed that you would not."

"Now I was going to New Orleans to fit out a craft and again rove the seas, when I saw this notice of the new master of Castle Moro."

"It struck me that it was Monsieur Belgarde, again come to this scene to visit more sorrow and suffering upon those whom I knew you so bitterly hated."

"Well, you have found me?"

"I have."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"I ask you if you are plotting more harm against the Grayhursts?"

"That is my affair."

"And mine too."

"Ha! I am to listen to this?" angrily said the Don.

"And more, unless you pledge me that you will not again strike a blow at these people."

"I shall make no such pledge, Bestor."

"Then I pledge you my word, in spite of the past between us, I will thwart any act of revenge you may attempt against them."

"How will you thwart it?"

"By denouncing you, if it must come to that."

"Who will believe you?"

"I will make the truth very plain."

"And convict yourself at the same time?"

"If I must, yes, to prevent you harming those against whom you have already struck the cruelest of blows."

"Bestor, I owe you my life on many occasions, and we have been the best of friends."

"Together we have risked our lives, shared dangers and hardships together, and won riches side by side, even though it was under the black flag."

"We parted, you with your fortune to go your way, and I with mine."

"I have given up piracy forever, and have settled here to carry out certain plans I have."

"I told you I would make a compact with you to do nothing to the Grayhursts."

"I changed my mind about coming here, under an assumed name met those I intended plotting against, and to-day we are friends, as I will show you, if you will visit there with me as my friend."

"And is there nothing underhand in your friendship for them."

"Go with me and see for yourself how I am regarded there."

"I will go, Don Juan, for I wish no quarrel with you, and would be only too glad to see your hatred for them turned to love."

"I could not let you wrong them, and so came here to tell you so."

"I will go with you to Belle Eden, and, after satisfying myself that you mean no harm will go my way, never to cross your path again; but a strange fatality brought that slip of paper before me, and I came to see if you were playing a deep game to destroy Planter Grayhurst, his wife and daughter, as you had his son."

"You will see for yourself, Bestor, that it is not as you believe."

"Now let us be friends, as in the past, and be my guest just so long as you please to remain."

Don Juan held forth his hand, Frank Bestor grasped it and a truce was settled between them; but in spite of this there was no doubt but that each man suspected the other of treachery, and made up his mind to act accordingly.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CRUISE OF THE SEA SHELL.

The next day Don Juan Moro drove his friend over to Belle Eden, introducing him as his partner in business enterprises in the East.

Frank Bestor met there face to face the parents whom he had brought sorrow upon by kidnapping their dearly loved son, and in spite of the scenes of misery and bloodshed in which he had been an actor, he felt a qualm of conscience as the beautiful mother grasped his hand in welcome.

Then too he received a warm welcome from Gaston Grayhurst, who told him that the friend of Don Juan was his friend.

And little Estelle came to him and put up her mouth for a kiss, while he started and turned pale as she said in her sweet way:

"I'm so glad you came with Uncle Don"—she had taken to calling Don Juan so at his request—"and I'll take you to see my brother Gordon's grave, for I love to go there and carry flowers."

"Did you know my brother Gordon?"

The man could not speak for a sensation of choking in his throat, and he merely shook his head.

"Poor brother was lost one night in the cruel sea; but we have not forgotten him, and mamma had such a pretty monument made in memory of him, and you must see it."

"We lost our son several years ago, sir, one night of storm when he was caught out in his little boat," explained Mr. Grayhurst, while Frank Bestor saw the beautiful eyes of his wife become dewy with tears, though she made no reply.

The Don was silent, for he had so often heard Gordon spoken of by those who so dearly loved his memory, that he had schooled himself to show no sign of emotion.

The feeling shown by Frank Bestor did not escape the fond mothers' eyes, and she felt that there was a bond of sympathy between her and the Don's friend.

"Ah, Don, it was a cruel thing to strike that blow upon those three," said Frank Bestor as the two drove home together.

"It is done and cannot be recalled."

"Are you not satisfied, Bestor, that I am their friend?"

"It would seem so, Don Juan."

"And am I not treated with every kindness and friendship?"

"You are?"

"Then you can understand that even I have a heart, and, having satisfied a revenge felt in the past, am content now to atone for that past all in my power!"

"I am glad to hear you say that you feel that way."

"I do: but to your future?"

"How?"

"What will you do?"

"I hardly know."

"Will you remain here with me?"

"No, oh no, for the sight of that family I could never endure."

"My home is yours if you will accept its hospitality."

"Thank you no, I must wander away again."

"You have plenty?"

"Oh, yes, for I buried my treasure, reserving a handsome sum for me."

"Well, you need not hurry away at least."

"To-morrow we will take a cruise in my yacht along the Gulf shores and into Mobile Bay, for you will enjoy it."

"I should like to go very much."

"You will find in the crew some old friends of the Idle Wings's last voyage."

"I remember that you retained a certain number of the slaves for yourself; but can you trust them?"

"Yes, for I rule them both by superstition and kindness, and then have promised them some day to restore them to their homes, or go and bring their kindred here as they may desire."

"Should they doubt you they will prove treacherous."

"I have feared so, and yet I believe now they are true as steel."

"I hope you will find them so," was the reply.

The next day the Sea Shell started on her short cruise, and upon going on board Frank Bestor had seemed not to be remembered by the savage crew.

If they recalled him as the lieutenant of the Idle Wings, who had treated them so kindly on the voyage, they showed no indication of doing so.

The Sea Shell's anchor was soon up, the sails spread, and the yacht headed along the shores toward Dauphin Island.

Frank Bestor was amazed at the discipline and skill of the crew of savages.

It was simply perfection in the manner of handling the sails.

A quartermaster stood at the wheel like a black statue, his eyes on the course ahead, and alternately watching the sails of the vessel.

The others stood ready to do their duty when needed without any order.

"How are they at the guns?" asked Frank Bestor admiringly.

"I will show you," responded the Don and he continued:

"I will have them put the schooner in fighting trim."

He stepped below as he spoke and returned on deck with a sword in hand.

This he waved around his head while he gave utterance to a peculiar cry:

"Koolah!"

As the Don uttered the word the crew of savages sprung to their posts, some to strip the schooner to fighting canvas and others to the guns.

Almost in the twinkling of an eye the schooner was under three lower sails only, and the savages were ready to handle the guns.

"Their training is marvelous," said Frank

Bestor, and, when the Don replaced his sword in his scabbard, as a signal for the black crew to reset full sail and return to their posts as before, the maneuvers were executed with astonishing quickness and perfection.

Passing into Mobile Bay the Sea Shell cruised swiftly along under easy sail until the town of Mobile appeared in the distance.

A storm was coming up, but instead of running for an anchorage the Don put the Sea Shell about and headed down the bay, keeping as near the center as possible.

"Come, Bestor, it is going to be a black night, so we will dine before sunset and then remain on deck to watch, for this is a dangerous cruising ground in darkness and storm," and the Don led the way into his luxuriously furnished cabin.

An hour after the Don came on deck and took the helm from the black helmsman.

Night had settled down upon the sea and the storm raged wildly.

Then another form came out of the cabin, the yacht lurched wildly as he did so, and then came a cry from the Don:

"Man overboard!"

CHAPTER XXX.

TO SILENCE A WITNESS.

WHEN Don Juan Moro invited Frank Bestor into the cabin of the Sea Shell to have an early dinner, that both might go on watch as soon as night came on, they found the meal already prepared by the steward, as though the order to have it an hour sooner had been given before.

The Don lived like a king, and all that gold could buy he had for his table.

The wines were of the best, and with perfect confidence in the African crew to take care of the schooner until night came on, when the navigation of the bay would devolve upon the Don, the two men enjoyed their dinner immensely.

As darkness came on the Don said:

"Finish your wine and cigar, Bestor, while I go on deck."

"You can join me there."

Frank Bestor made no reply.

He seemed to have drank too much, for his head drooped forward and his hand had fallen from the table where it held his glass.

The Don looked at him with a malignant light in his eyes, and then he turned on his heel, drew on his storm coat and hat and went on deck.

The darkness had settled upon the seas, the low shores of the bay were shut out of sight and the wind was blowing a gale.

The waves ran high, the clouds shut out all the stars, and it looked as though it was to be a very ugly night.

The Don stepped to the wheel and ordered the helmsman forward.

Then he had the schooner stripped to fore storm-staysails and reefed mainsail.

It was all that she needed in that blow.

He knew about where he was, with Fowl River on the starboard nine miles away, and Point Clear to the port several leagues away.

Astern of him seven leagues was Mobile, and before him stretched the unbroken bay down to Dauphin Island, twenty miles distant.

"The very place," muttered the Don, and as he spoke a form suddenly appeared in the cabin companionway.

It was Frank Bestor and he clutched at the rails as he came on deck.

His appearance was that of a man deeply under the influence of liquor.

"My God!" said the Don between his teeth.

"He did not take enough to stupefy him wholly.

"But I must act now, for to hesitate will ruin all."

Just then Frank Bestor stepped on deck.

As he did so the yacht gave a tremendous lurch, the act of the Don at the wheel, and Frank Bestor was hurled against the low taffrail.

He caught on it and it seemed as though he would have saved himself; but the Don sprung to his rescue and then came a plunge and Frank Bestor sunk beneath the waves.

The Don secured the helm ere the Sea Shell could come to and his voice rung out loudly:

"Man overboard!"

But though the black crew sprung promptly to their posts it was an age it seemed, ere the yacht was brought to.

Then the Don shouted loudly but no answer came to him over the wild waters.

"Just as he came on deck a wild lurch of the schooner threw him against the taffrail, and though I tried to grasp him he went over."

So he explained to his negro steward who ran on deck with frightened face.

For a long while the yacht lay to, but the missing man could not be found, in that black night and wild sea, and the Sea Shell held on her way once more.

The gale had switched around from the northward to the southward, and the yacht ran in under the point of land where Fort Morgan now stands, and dropped anchor until morning.

When dawn came the sea was yet wild, but the gale had subsided into a steady six-knot breeze.

The Sea Shell got under way and held her

course around Dauphin Island for the Bay St. Louis.

It was night when they dropped anchor in the cove off Castle Moro and the Don went ashore to his home.

He paced his library to and fro, his face wearing a strange expression, one impossible to fathom.

At last he began to muse aloud:

"I am sure that Bestor came here with but one purpose in view."

"His talk about his conscience troubling him for having kidnapped that boy was all nonsense, for he cared nothing for that."

"No he came here to get that treasure, and I don't believe a word about his seeing what he says he did on a slip of paper about my home."

"No, he was told by that dying sailor that old Don Moro had a treasure hidden in this castle."

"The sailor said that the old Don had married a young girl who had a sailor lover, and he went to piracy after his sweetheart wedded another."

"Years after, he visited the home of the old Don here and killed him, his wife and household, but failed to get the treasure said to be hidden here."

"The sailor described its hiding-place as told to him by one of the Don's servants, but I certainly have not been able to find it, and I have always believed that Frank Bestor did not describe the spot correctly and how to find it, but kept the knowledge a secret for some future day when he could get it himself."

"I feel sure now that that is why he came, and I have done right in taking his life."

"That drug did not work as thoroughly as I had expected it would, or he would never have been able to come on deck."

"Well, he has gone at last, the deed is done, and I have to regret taking the life of one who has been to me the friend he has, for he has been true as steel."

"But self-preservation is nature's law, and I adopt it as my own."

"I will not be driven from my course, blow the winds ever so foul, for I have made my chart and shall sail by it to triumph in the end!"

"I can tell my story to the Grayhursts, and, as no one saw me thrust him over, no witness is there against me."

"No, not even my savages of the sea, quick as are their eyes, believe that I am guilty, for they deemed Bestor my best friend."

"I will look among his traps to see if he has any paper or map bearing on the old Don's treasure, which certainly is hidden somewhere in this mansion."

He went to the room of the guest he had rid himself of so cleverly, and sought among the scant baggage he had brought on horseback with him for any papers.

There was nothing, and only a small sum in gold.

"Well, I have at least rid myself of one I have ever feared from some reason," he muttered, as he returned once more to the library to sit and muse over all that had happened of late to him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SURPRISE FOR THE DON.

A FEELING of gloom came over the household of Belle Eden, when Don Juan Moro drove up the morning after his return, and told of the loss of his dear friend Bestor.

He told how he had taken him for a cruise up in Mobile Bay, and how delightful it had been until the storm set in, and that while he was at the helm Bestor had come out of the cabin to aid him, just as a huge sea struck the yacht.

"In vain did I try to save him," he continued.

"I sprung to his side, but too late, for the huge wave that boarded us washed him over the low taffrail, and, though I grasped him, I was unable to hold on, and he was swept overboard."

"I laid the yacht to for hours, and yet could not get a response to my hails, so I think he must have been stunned by being hurled against the taffrail."

Mr. and Mrs. Grayhurst felt as though they had lost a friend, and Estelle wept bitterly for her new acquaintance.

The remembrance of that night of storm, when Gordon disappeared, came back upon the parents with telling force.

The Don returned to Castle Moro greatly relieved, after having made his story known of the loss of Frank Bestor, and feeling that it was not doubted.

Like all men with a guilty conscience, he felt that suspicion might rest upon him, yet why it should he could not understand, for what motive, in the minds of others, in taking the life of his friend?

"I have gotten rid of the one man I feared, so now I must act, for why wait longer?"

"My plans are all made, and, if affairs turn out as I wish, it will yet take several years before I can win the big game for which I have played."

"No one suspects me now, and there is no danger that any of my old crew, did they come here, would know me as having been Pierre the Pirate."

"The savages on my yacht must be looked to, as in time they will have to speak English, for I believe my cook and steward on the Sea Shell secretly teach them, and they may at least make known that I was captain of a slaver, and got them on the coast of Africa from traders."

"This would look very bad for me, and be something I would give much to avoid."

"I could send them back to Africa: but the best plan would be to scuttle the yacht and send them on a cruise to their doom."

"At any rate they must do me no harm."

"The treasure in this old house I must find, cost what it will, so I will begin at once to remodel room by room until I come upon the hiding place of the old Don's gold."

"The sailor described it to Bestor as worth a king's ransom, and the jewels of several generations of the Moors."

"I would, with it, and what I have and that which I hope to get through the game I am playing, be one of the richest of men."

"Well, that is what I have sinned for, killed for and sold my soul to Satan to accomplish."

"I cannot turn back now."

"The boy is dead and his bones bleaching in far-away Africa, so that she alone stands between me and my triumph."

"Yes, I have waited full long, the hour to begin is at hand, and I will commence my work without longer delay."

As though having made up his mind to some desperate act, or crime, he seemed no longer in excitable mood but perfectly calm.

He ate a hearty supper and then retired to rest.

But at midnight he awoke.

The winds were sweeping about the curves of the house with terrific force and howling like wild beasts.

The thunder and lightning were incessant and the mansion, solid as it was, fairly shook under the shock.

The huge trees swayed to and fro wildly, and here was one's branches wrenched off and there another uprooted.

"It is a fearful night."

"I only hope the Sea Shell has both anchors down," said the Don as he awoke.

Then he arose and went to the window to look out.

The roar of the waves reached his ears and the howling of the winds was appalling even to him.

But all was darkness without and he could not see the cove.

So he waited for a flash of lightning.

Soon it came and the crash of thunder that followed shook the earth.

But the lightning flash revealed to him the yacht.

He awaited another flash.

Soon it came and he beheld the beautiful vessel riding the waves like a swan, both anchors out, topmast and bowsprit housed and all furled close to resist the gale.

Back to his bed went Don Juan Moro, and yet it was not to sleep, for the storm was too violent.

At length the wind ceased to blow so fiercely, and slowly died out, and the rain began to descend in torrents.

The thunder was no longer heard, the lightning's flashes ceased, and the patter of the rain upon the window-panes soothed the Don to sleep.

It was late when he awoke, and his valet stood by his side when he did so, ready to aid in his master's toilet.

At length the Don was ready for breakfast, and stepped out upon the broad piazza, where he could witness the damage done by the storm.

Then from his lips broke a cry that startled the African valet, and brought him with a bound to his master's side.

"My yacht! my yacht! Where is she?"

The cove was plainly visible, but the yacht was not at anchor there.

She had most mysteriously disappeared.

Then the Don swept the waters of the bay, the sound, and the distant Gulf with his glass. Not a sail was in sight.

"I see how it is, she began to drag, and the savages put out to sea."

"She will return to-day."

But the day passed and the Sea Shell did not return, and a month went by, but still the armed yacht did not appear.

But not a soul could account for the mysterious disappearance of the yacht, and it was believed that she had been driven out to sea and foundered.

But no trace of her could be found on the shore, nor was a body of any one of her savage crew washed up on the beach.

"Those black devils stole her, that is what they did, and started for Africa."

"Well, let them go, for they will reach the bottom of the sea before they ever find Africa," and with this the Don dismissed the matter from his mind, or tried to do so.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OVERBOARD.

BUT for the fact that he knew Don Juan Moro well, and was aware how treacherous he could be, where his own safety and interests were concerned, Frank Bestor would never have left the table that night in the yacht alive.

He had watched the Don with the eye of a hawk, though not appearing to do so, and had seen him slip something, a powder, he thought, into a decanter of wine.

The Don had poured a glass of the wine into his own glass, and then decided that he preferred port, so set the sherry aside.

Watching his chance, Frank Bestor spilled the glass of wine upon the floor unseen by the Don.

Several times he sipped of another glass, though he knew not what the effect would be.

Again he emptied a glass unseen by the Don, and another sip from a fresh glass poured out caused his head to swim.

This told him how deadly had been the drug used by the Don.

He knew that a glassfull even would end his life; but he quietly ate on and destroyed the effects of what he had taken, while he also helped himself to the port from the Don's decanter.

Then, as the meal was finished, Frank Bestor played his part well.

His head drooped on his breast, and his hand slipped from the table, shattering the glass he held in it.

"He is done for!" said the Don, and he rose from the table, put on his storm-suit, and went on deck.

Then Frank Bestor looked up.

It was not an easy matter to rouse himself, little as he had taken, and he felt bewildered and dizzy.

He hardly knew what to do.

That the Don meant to rid himself of him he had the best of proof.

If he went on deck, he must still pretend to be greatly under the influence of the drug.

He certainly dared not trust the Don, and the influence he held over the Sea Savages might cause them to hurl him into the sea at his order.

He would go on deck and pretend to have drunk too much.

Then he would await events as they transpired, and be ready to act accordingly and as best he could.

So he went on deck, and seeing him, the Don purposefully moved his helm and shipped a sea.

Half dazed as he was, Frank Bestor lost his footing and was thrown against the taffrail.

He grasped hard to save himself, and then felt a grasp upon him, a huge wave and he was swept overboard.

The cool water revived him at once.

From his earliest boyhood he had been a famous swimmer.

Often when a mere lad he had swum races with the seamen of his father's vessels, and beaten them, too.

He had dared go out through the breakers in the wildest storms that beat upon the coast where he dwelt.

To swim several miles on a stretch had been nothing to him.

So the moment he felt himself in the sea he determined to struggle hard for life and not give up.

When on the Idle Wings he had cruised often in Mobile Bay and he was aware of about where he was.

He could not be over seven miles from the shore, at furthest, and he knew that the coast was shallow and sandy, with no rocks, affording him a firm footing, with no danger of being dashed to death.

He cast aside his coat and shoes, and knew that the wind was blowing him, and the waves bearing him toward the point clear shore.

He had only to support himself, for the wind and waves bore him rapidly along.

He was now wholly himself again, for the cool waters and the wind had driven off the powers of the drug.

He was not tired, and so went along, striking out only to steady himself.

It seemed that he was hours in the water.

Could the wind have changed and be driving him down the bay and thence out into the gulf?

He dreaded it at times, so long did he seem to have been in the water.

That he could be thus blown out to sea, if he could sustain himself he well knew, for in the darkness he could not see the low shores.

Suddenly his hand touched something.

Eagerly he grasped it to find that it was a large log.

The moment that he felt its support he knew how tired he was.

He clung hard to the log, knowing that it was a piece of driftwood that had floated down out of the Alabama or Spanish rivers.

He had been for some time upon the log when he felt a shock that released his hold.

One end of the log had struck the bottom.

He lowered his feet, felt the bottom and with a cry of joy started shoreward, half walking, struggling and driven by waves and wind.

At length he reached the sandy beach, staggered up beyond the reach of the waters, and sunk down upon a grassy knoll completely exhausted.

He dropped into a deep slumber from which he did not wake until the dawn was breaking.

Then he arose, stiff and sore, and walked along the shore toward a cabin he saw in the distance.

He reached it at last, and the astonished farmer bade him welcome.

Frank Bestor told him that he had been washed overboard from a vessel on which he had been a passenger, that he had some gold with him and would pay liberally to be taken to Mobile.

The farmer told him he would sail him over, or put him on board of some inbound vessel, and then told him to have some breakfast and go to bed until his clothing was dried for him.

For hours he slept, and when he awoke he found dinner awaiting him, his clothing all dried and pressed out by the farmer's good wife, and a pair of shoes and coat ready for him.

"There's a ship a-comin' in, sir, and I'll put you on board of her, for she's bound to Mobile," said Mr. Baldwin, the old farmer.

So out to the ship they went in Farmer Baldwin's little sloop, and Frank Bestor soon found himself in comfortable quarters.

The ship was out of Boston, and the captain gave his passenger some papers to look over.

Hardly had Frank Bestor cast his eyes over one page when he started, turned deadly pale, and said in a voice that was tremulous with emotion:

"No, no, this must not be, for I can save him."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRANK BESTOR'S RESOLVE.

THAT which Frank Bestor had started, at reading in the Boston paper, was as follows:

"The testimony for and against was fully weighed in the charge of the judge to the jury, and the verdict was guilty that was rendered against Carter Weston.

"The whole facts of the case proved that he had taken the life of his brother-in-law, Gregory Vance, and concocted the story about Frank Bestor's having returned and fought a duel with him.

"The testimony of the prisoner's sister, Mrs. Gregory Vance, was evidently given to save her brother from the gallows, for all she said was that she had seen Frank Bestor land from a vessel that had merely touched in port and then gone on her way.

"So the prisoner was sentenced to be hanged two months from the day of his having been found guilty and—"

Here the article ended, and Frank Bestor glanced at the date of the paper.

"It is one month since he was sentenced, and what I do must be done at once."

Landing in Mobile, he at once purchased a small cat-rigged boat, for fortunately he had his belt of gold with him, and had stuck to it during his swim for life.

The boat was well decked over, some twenty feet in length, and had the appearance of being both stanch and a good sailor.

Then he purchased some stores, a rifle and pistols, and a suit of sailor clothing, tarpaulin and all.

Six hours after landing in Mobile he set sail, alone, and his destination was down the coast.

It was night when he ran out of Mobile River into the bay, but the wind was fair, and keeping the shore on his starboard well in sight he held on his way.

At dawn he ran between Dauphin Island and the mainland and soon after dropped anchor in an inlet for breakfast and rest.

By noon he was again on his way, and the wind was fresh off-shore, so that the Sound was comparatively smooth, and his little boat went bowling along at a rapid rate.

It was nightfall when he again anchored for rest and food, and there was a light far away in the distance which he knew came from the tower of Castle Moro.

There was an ugly look about the skies, and Frank Bestor knew that a severe storm was threatening.

"It will be all the better for it," he said, and he held on under the rising wind with all sail set.

It was midnight before he reached Castle Moro Cove and he ran boldly in.

The wind was still rising, the heavens were black with storm-clouds, and the yacht was tugging at her anchors as though frightened at the coming of the tempest.

The sailor ran up under the lee of the yacht unseen by her sable crew until almost aboard.

Then there was a cry of alarm in an unknown tongue, followed quickly by the words, spoken in the African language:

"Be still, warriors! I am the friend of your people."

A cry in chorus came from the savage crew, at hearing their language spoken, and the next instant the bold sailor leaped upon the yacht's deck.

Just then a flash of lightning revealed who he was, and instantly every black savage pros-

trated himself before the sailor upon the deck of the armed yacht.

Frank Bestor had made the study of the African tongue, business in his voyages to the coast, and with slaves, and he spoke it fluently.

Quickly he told the blacks that it was not his spirit they saw, for he was alive, and had escaped from death.

He told them much more, and then bade them arise.

They obeyed with alacrity, and the sailor went on to tell them much more.

What it was it certainly impressed them, for they muttered joyously among themselves and then bent low before him.

The result of all this was that the sail of the cat-rig was lowered and the little boat hauled aft and made fast to the stern of the schooner.

The storm was now raging furiously, the lightning keeping up a perfect sheet of vivid flame over the skies, and the thunder roaring ominously.

But the schooner's storm-sails were set, the anchor gotten up and in the midst of the tempest the Sea Shell went driving away from her anchorage right out into the teeth of the gale, with the sail-boat in tow.

Once out of the Bay St. Louis and the plunging sail-boat was cut loose, for she had been scuttled, and she soon sunk beneath the waves, while the yacht, under reefed-down mainsail and fore storm-staysail went driving out toward the Gulf at a pace that threatened to drop the tower of Castle Moro out of sight by morning.

And when the day did dawn the sun rose in a clear sky, the Gulf was rolling heavily and the Sea Shell, under pressure of a stiff breeze astern was surging along on a coarse that would bring her in the vicinity of Key West if she did not change it.

The wind held fresh, while the storm-swept sea went down and Key West, after a rapid run was left astern and the course of the Sea Shell laid north by east.

Her destination was for a small port on the coast of Massachusetts, for the daring man who had cut her out of her anchorage had formed the resolve to rescue Carter Weston from the gallows.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TWO CULPRITS.

DON JUAN MORO was a far-sighted man.

He had shown this in many ways, and especially where he had planned his own safety.

When he had given up piracy, he yet felt that he would feel more secure, in case of recognition, or accidents, by having a vessel at his command, and he had accordingly had the Sea Shell built from a design of his own.

He had drawn an excellent design, too, copying all the good points of his famous schooner Idle Wings, and improving upon her bad qualities.

The result was that he had in the Sea Shell a most superior craft, which, though small, could sail the world over, and in a flight could show a clean pair of heels to any craft that might give her chase.

On the plea that he was a planter on the coast and in the West Indies, visiting his plantations often, he had gotten a permit from the Government to arm his yacht and man her with a crew of his own slaves.

These slaves, as the reader is aware, were picked from the cargo brought over in the Idle Wings, and a splendid lot they were, not one under six feet, all broad-shouldered, powerful fellows as black as ebony, and with the fierceness of tigers in their native jungles if armed.

The Don spoke their language and had thus gained their confidence, and numerous presents made them, had kept his influence over them.

The Don, prepared in the possession of his yacht, for flight for his own safety if need be, kept the Sea Shell constantly provisioned for a long cruise of months.

His own larder was supplied with the best, and the sable crew of savages were fed on what they liked best.

The lockers and pantry of the yacht were filled with choicest wines and edibles such as could be kept, and at an instant's notice the Sea Shell was prepared for a voyage.

A negro cook and steward, who dreaded the African crew and were anxious to keep on the good side of them, were kept on the yacht, and so it was that Frank Bestor had put to sea in perfect trim for a voyage.

His treatment of the poor kidnapped blacks had been so kind on the voyage over, that he had really won their affection, and he had, on going on board with Don Moro, been greeted with silent pleasure by the crew, though they had been careful that their master should not see it, for they stood in terror of the Don, kind though he was to them.

But they seemed to realize that it was the kindness of one acting for his own interests.

The yacht's cabin was fitted up with a luxury that was beyond description, for the Don liked his comfort, and, in fact, every part of the craft was a model of convenience and beauty combined.

The three guns she carried were of the very finest manufacture, thirty-twos in caliber, and so mounted that she could give a broadside of three shots, and in chase and flight had a splendid piece for offense and defense.

Boarding-pikes, cutlasses, rifles and pistols were in sheltered racks, ready for use, and the crew had been disciplined and trained in their use as well as in working the heavy guns.

Dressed in snowy white, knee pants, shirts and skull-caps, their uniform was in odd contrast to their inky-black skin.

Their legs from the knee were bare, their arms, also, from the shoulder, and they wore no shoes.

Such was the craft that Frank Bestor had gotten possession of, and the crew were more devotedly his slaves than they had been the minions of Don Juan Moro.

The colored cook and steward had not been awakened by the storm of the night or the schooner's getting under way.

The truth, as it must be told, was that they had found a means of getting into the wine-room, and each night these two worthies, expecting the Don would certainly not sail before morning, had gone to their bunks near the cabin as drunk as lords.

The cook had trained the crew not to expect an early breakfast when in port, and hence they were not disappointed, and this gave him an opportunity of indulging in sleep until several hours after sunrise—slumber that was very much needed to get rid of the effects of the hard drinking of the two the night before.

The steward had work to do, unless he willed to help the cook, only when his master was on board, so he always slept late in port.

The cook awoke, the morning after the flight of the Sea Shell from Castle Moro Cove, with a head that felt like a bee-hive.

He and his worthy companion had drank deeper than usual the night before.

He listened and heard the wash of waters, and more, he felt the motion of the vessel.

The sun shone through the skylight overhead and he sprung out of his bunk.

With a vigorous pull he dragged the steward out upon the floor of their mutual little state-room.

"De ship's at sea, Neptune," he hoarsely whispered in dire alarm.

"Whar ought she ter be, Gridiron? Does yer want her ashore?" gasped Neptune half awake.

"No, sah, but de Sea Shell am on a cruise, sart'in, de master am on board and nobody has waked us up.

"We is dead niggers, hanged and destroyed, Neptune."

"Oh Lordy persarve thy most miser'ble servant," groaned Neptune, now fully awake.

It did not take Gridiron long to breathe a fervent amen to this prayer.

Then the two tremblingly set about putting on their ship's scanty uniform and they opened the door and peeped out into the gangway.

Directly opposite was the wine pantry; but they had closed and locked the door so they dared not attempt to get a much needed "bracer" for their shattered nerves.

The door leading from the gangway into the cabin was closed.

They must relieve their suspense however, and so Neptune slowly opened it, and said:

"Does yer wish ter git up now, massa?"

No reply came, and the steward looked back at Gridiron for encouragement.

It came in these words:

"We is dead niggers sart'in."

They were painfully sober by this time, and had forgotten that their heads felt like a bee-hive.

Into the cabin stepped Neptune.

No one was there, but that some one had been was evident, for a strange storm-coat lay on a divan and some things the steward had never seen before were upon the table.

"Gridiron?"

"Well honey?"

"You git into de caboose as quick as you kin and light a fire ter git breakfast, and I clean up in here and sot de table for de master, for maybe he been too busy to git hungry as dere has been a storm, I guesses."

Gridiron skulked forward along the gangway, while Neptune began to bustle about the cabin.

"De massa's got comp'ny sart'in," he said as he looked over the things which Frank Bestor had brought with him out of the sail-boat, and which he had purchased in Mobile.

As the negro spoke he saw feet coming down the gangway, and he uttered a yell of terror and dropped upon his knees with clasped hands, just as Gridiron came flying into the cabin from the gangway shouting:

"Lordy, Neptune! it's de ghost o' Massa Bestor has run off wid de ship!"

Frank Bestor it was who entered the cabin.

He had not even remembered the cook and steward, supposing that the Don brought them on board when he went on his cruises.

Gridiron in going to the caboose had seen him, the man he deemed at the bottom of the sea, and he had fled for comfort to Neptune.

He had arrived just as the sailor, having shaped the course of the Sea Shell and left a

black at the wheel, had gone down into the cabin expecting to get his own breakfast.

He realized the situation in an instant and burst out into a hearty laugh; but the two negroes still remained upon their knees chattering prayers.

"Silence, you fools! I am no ghost, for I escaped drowning."

"But I am master on board this craft and you will find it out if you do not obey my orders."

"Quick! get breakfast for me, and why is it that the crew have been kept without theirs so long?"

"Off with you!"

They went like mad out of the cabin, and never was a breakfast quicker prepared than the one which was that morning set before Frank Bestor.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SEA SHELL IN PORT.

In taking the schooner as he had done, Frank Bestor felt that he had simply gotten even with the Don who had sought to rid himself of one who knew too much about him.

He was sure that the Don believed him dead, and the storm had come in as to his rescue, which would give the idea that the yacht had either broken away from her moorings, or had been run out to sea by her crew for fear of being driven ashore.

As she did not return it would be supposed that she had gone down at sea with all on board.

Believing him, Bestor, to be dead, he would not be connected with the disappearance of the Sea Shell in the mind of Don Juan.

In the yacht Frank Bestor knew that he had a treasure.

He had made use of her for a purpose of his own, and that accomplished he had not decided what he would do.

Since his return to his home and finding Miriam another's wife, and his mother dead, his heart had been sadder than ever before in his life.

He had avenged himself in the death of Gregory Vance, but he had become a wanderer once more through his act.

Such were the thoughts that filled the mind of the sailor as he went northward.

His destination was the port where he had been born.

Once there he would act.

That he could trust his African crew he felt certain, but that he must watch the two negroes, Neptune and Gridiron, he also knew.

He had decided just what they had been about, and he was determined to keep a tight rein upon them.

All the politeness and big words of Neptune made no impression upon him.

He took a look at the pantry, the stores and the wine-room, and he discovered that the cognac cask had been very lately tampered with.

He simply said to the steward one day:

"Go and tell Gridiron to come here."

Neptune felt that the cook was to be instructed in some new dish that pleased the palate of their new master, and he hinted as much as the two were on the way to the cabin.

"Gridiron, I sent for you that you might hear what I have to say to Neptune."

"He has been in the habit of stealing liquors and getting drunk every night, and if I catch him at it, and I shall keep a close watch, I shall hang him and you too."

"You can go, Gridiron, back to your duties."

The two negroes turned of an ashen hue.

They each understood just what was known to their captain, and just what was meant.

The cook returned to his caboose a very scared negro, and he vowed by his kettles and his pots to swear off forever from intoxicating drinks.

The steward was not so fortunate as to be dismissed.

He remained to wait upon his master, and he was very scared and also looked comically foolish in an endeavor to appear innocent.

But Frank Bestor said no more.

There was no need of it as far as the two negroes were concerned.

Among his crew none of the Africans were navigators, of course.

They had sailed on their own coasts in *dhow*s, and had become expert sailors, but they could not navigate a vessel from port to port if they left the land out of sight.

So Frank Bestor had to be a great deal on deck.

He would lay a course to be held on for hours, and knew that it would be held to religiously by the black helmsman, and then he would seek rest, ordering Neptune to call him at a certain time.

Thus was the schooner run on her northward cruise until one day, just at sunset, the coast of Massachusetts was in full view.

Frank Bestor had calculated well, for on the ridge he recognized the fine mansion of the late Judge Weston, beneath the roof of which Miriam dwelt, mistress of all.

"This just suits me," he said, as he saw that

the skies were becoming overcast with clouds, and the night promised to be dark.

On his run northward the sailor had manufactured a very clever disguise out of various things, and when he tried it on he looked for all the world like an old sailor of sixty.

He knew every foot of the approach to the harbor, as well as the harbor itself, and taking the helm, ran in to the anchorage.

The lights of the village lay ahead, with half a hundred crafts of various tonnage anchored off-shore, their lights twinkling as they rose and fell upon the waves.

But the Sea Shell carried no lights, the night was dark, and under only sail enough to give her steerageway, she ran in and dropped anchor just off the cabin of the Widow Bestor.

Then the gig was lowered, two blacks got in and took the oars, and Frank Bestor was set ashore within a few paces of his old home.

He bade the blacks await him off-shore a few boat-lengths, and then walked up to the cabin.

It was still deserted, but the sign "For sale" had been taken down, and the place seemed to be kept in perfect order.

He stood upon the very spot where Gregory Vance had fallen, run through the heart by a rapier in his hand, and seemed to be lost in deep and painful meditation for some minutes.

Then, with a sigh he walked around the cottage and unrolled a bundle he carried in his arms.

It contained a lantern, a small looking-glass and his disguise.

The latter he proceeded to put on, and soon, looking the picture of an old sailor, he wended his way down the beach path toward the town.

It was not late, and the shops were not yet closed, and in his door sat Toby, the locksmith, smoking vigorously, as though his thoughts were not of the pleasantest nature.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PLOTTING.

"WELL, Toby, old friend, how goes it with you?"

This salutation, from one who looked like a stranger to him, caused Toby to start and eye the speaker curiously.

Toby's conscience had been fretful of late.

He knew that he too could have sworn to the fact that Frank Bestor had been in port the night of Gregory Vance's death, but he had not done so, and as the time drew near for the hanging of Carter Weston for his murder it caused the locksmith to pass many sleepless nights.

Therefore he started as he was spoken to.

"You has the 'vantage o' me, friend," he said cautiously.

"You do not recognize an old friend, Toby?"

"I do not."

"Look at me good."

"I'm a-lookin'."

"Never seen me before?"

"Not as I remembers."

"There, now look as yon light shines full upon me."

"Do you not know me?"

"I do not, friend."

"My disguise is certainly a good one," muttered Bestor to himself, and he added aloud:

"I'll tell you where last we met."

"I'd like to know, for I don't like to forget the face of a friend."

"It was some months ago in this very shop, when you did me the kindness to go with me and open my mother's cottage near the cliff."

Toby almost dropped to the floor, while to his lips came the words:

"Master Frank Bestor!"

"Yes, Toby."

"An old man so soon in life?"

"All put on, Toby, gray wig and beard, and you must admit it is a good disguise."

"Lord, but it is; but oh, Master Frank, he sentenced to be hanged."

"Carter Weston?"

"Yes, sir, for they say he killed the judge's son-in-law."

"I heard so, Toby, and I have come to clear him of that charge and I want you to help me."

"I'll never refuse you, Master Frank, for I loved you as a boy and your parents were always good to me."

"I could have sworn with Miss Miriam as I saw you here, but you told me to keep quiet and I said nothing, and they found him guilty, for he owed his brother-in-law much money and wished to square 'em they said."

"And Miriam—that is Mrs. Vance swore that I was here?"

"She said as how you had come in, gone to your cottage and then departed, and it might be as her brother said, you had met her husband and killed him in a duel."

"She said in a duel, Toby."

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure of this?"

"Oh, yes, Master Frank, for she said if you had killed her husband she knew that it had not been a murder."

"Miriam said this, did she?" and Frank Bestor spoke as though to himself.

"She did."

"Well, Toby, I want you to go to the justice and Lawyer Scott, and tell them to accompany

you to a certain place on the shore to hear a confession from a man, a confession on which a life hangs.

"I will pay you well for your services, Toby, and pay you now; but you are to have them there at a certain time only."

"You are to go now and see them, saying you will call when ready."

"Then you are to return here to your shop and wait until you hear three loud knocks upon your door."

"Then go after them and bring them to the cottage of—"

"Your mother's?"

"Yes."

"No, Master Frank."

"Why not, for it is vacant."

"They do say it's haunted, sir."

"Nonsense! you come there with the justice and Lawyer Scott and I will be there awaiting you."

"You hain't afraid of ghosts?" said Toby advisingly.

"Not I."

"And yet you made the ghost."

"Ah! it's said to be Gregory Vance's ghost is it, that haunts the cottage?"

Toby nodded.

"Well, I don't fear ghost or devil, so I'll be there."

"I'll come with em."

"Now when is Carter Weston sentenced to be hanged?"

"In one week."

"Where is he?"

"In the town jail."

"It is still in the upper edge of the town near the shore?"

"Yes, sir, they hain't moved it yet, tho' they has talked of it for thirty year or more."

"Has the town built up any more around it?"

"Not a bit, for folks don't like the neighborhood o' jails to live in; but the town has built up in other directions."

"Who is the jailer?"

"Seth Saunders."

"I remember him in the long ago, and how it was said his wife was the keeper and Seth her assistant."

"The old woman is dead this year."

"Ah, I am glad to hear that," said Frank Bestor, evidently pleased with the tidings.

"And are there many prisoners in the jail now?"

"None but Master Carter, for this is a peaceable town, Master Frank, and they do fear it will give us bad luck to have a hanging in it, as not a soul has been strung up here since the witches was years ago."

"Has Seth any assistants, Toby?"

"Two since it's drawing near the hanging."

"All right, Toby, here is a purse of gold for you, and you wait here after you have seen the justice and Mr. Scott."

"Then, when you hear the three knocks, go after them and lead them to the cottage."

"Do you understand fully, Toby?"

"I do, sir."

"Well, make no mistake."

"I won't, sir; but Master Carter is not to hang then?"

"Wait and see."

"I'm a happy man if he don't, I am," muttered Toby, as the disguised sailor turned and walked rapidly back to the cottage, off which he had left his boat.

He did not care for the Africans to see him in a disguise, so he removed it and hailed his boat, which came rapidly ashore for him.

He steered directly out to the schooner, boarded and gave a few orders, and a boat with six blacks was lowered.

The other boat, the gig, was ordered to pull back off the cottage and remain there until he hailed.

Getting into the large boat he took the tiller, the oarsmen bent to their oars, and the daring sailor steered directly through the harbor toward the upper part of the town, passing silently and unchallenged through the various vessels at anchor in the port.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CAGED.

THE town jail in the little seaport which the Sea Shell had entered, was situated toward the upper end of the harbor, just out of the business part of the village.

It was surrounded by a wall, and as Toby the locksmith had said, was not crowded by neighbors, for people had not cared to locate too near such a dismal abode of wretchedness.

The captain of the Sea Shell knew the spot well, and he was aware that he could run his boat to within a hundred yards

with him, and two of them submitted to being bound with ropes, it seemed.

Then he led the way through the grove up to the jail.

A loud rap with the knocker brought a query from within the gate after a moment's delay of:

"Who is it?"

"Jailer Saunders, is that you?" asked Bestor.

"Yes; who are you?"

"I am captain of a vessel in port, and was sent here by Justice Gore with two blacks who have mutinied on a Southern ship and done worlds of damage."

"Please lock them up for me, and if you have any assistants call them to help you, for these are desperate fellows."

Seth Saunders blew a whistle which brought his two assistants, and then the gate was opened and the two bound blacks led in by their four comrades.

As they entered the jail the two bound men quickly released themselves, and in an instant Seth Saunders and his two assistants found themselves each in the grasp of two savages—a grasp that held them as in a vise.

With his hat pulled down over his eyes, his coat-collar turned up, and holding his head low, Frank Bestor stepped forward, took the keys from the belt of the jailer, and led the way to an inner cell.

Opening the door, he ordered his men in their own tongue to thrust the three men into the cell, and it was quickly done.

"Who are you, and what means this infamous outrage?" cried Seth Saunders, wild with rage.

"It is no outrage, my dear Seth, but justice, as you will discover, for I act to save an innocent man from the gallows."

Then calling to his blacks to follow, Bestor led the way to the "strong cell," where, as a boy, he knew the most dangerous characters were kept, while the three keepers set up a howl in chorus at their misfortune.

"Silence! If you give an alarm by your cries, I will set this old rookery on fire over your heads," said Frank Bestor, as he strode back to the cell and confronted the three men at the door.

He had no intention of carrying out his terrible threat, but they suspected that he was capable of it and were silenced instantly.

"He's a-dosin' us with our own medicine, friends," said Seth, sadly, as he looked through the bars of the door out into the dimly-lighted corridor of the jail.

"Yes, and I don't like it," whined another.

"Who on 'arth has he got with him, for them don't look like human niggers?" said the third man.

"Lord knows! but who is he?"

"Don't know."

"Never seen him afore."

"It's going hard with us."

"He come to set the prisoner free."

"Hush! They is comin' now."

Such was the conversation between the trio of cleverly captured jailers.

In the mean time Frank Bestor found the cell he was looking for.

As he had supposed it was the one he had remembered as a boy.

An iron gate cut that end of the corridor off, but a key was found to fit it.

Beyond was the massive door of the cell, and a key was also found on the bunch to fit that.

The door swung open, and flashing a lantern into the dim cell, Frank Bestor saw the occupant stretched upon a cot, and with heavy manacles upon his ankles.

An untasted though tempting supper, sent by Miriam Vance sat upon the table, and as the sailor entered the room, he fairly started at the change in the prisoner.

So that was the once splendid-looking man whom his intimates had called an exquisite.

His face was white, haggard, and his eyes sunken, while the lips were drawn hard over the white teeth.

The form was emaciated to that degree that no one would have believed the clothes he wore had been made for him.

"Who are you?" he asked, faintly, when Frank Bestor stepped into the cell.

"It matters not now who I am, Mr. Weston; but I have come to save you from the gallows, and I have been successful thus far, for your three keepers are locked up."

"Let me unlock your irons?"

As he spoke he found the key to fit the manacles, and, without waiting for a word from the prisoner, said a few words to the blacks.

Two of them at once raised and supported him in their strong arms, and the sailor led the way from the cell.

"Seth Saunders, I will not keep you and your friends in there long, but send to release you soon."

"In the mean time, you can get a chance to appreciate just what one suffers behind the bars of a prison."

"Good-night, and remember what I said about crying for help."

The sailor passed on, locked the jail door behind the party, opened and locked the gate and led the way down to the shore in silence.

There lay the boat, and the rescued prisoner was placed in it, the blacks seized their oars and Frank Bestor took the tiller.

He steered through the fleet of vessels, on board of which silence now reigned, and landed at the last dock of the town.

Here he said something to the blacks, and then turning to Carter Weston continued:

"Mr. Weston, my men will take you on board my vessel and care for you until I come, for I have some work to do now that will detain me an hour yet."

"You are a free man, and in safe hands."

Frank Bestor would have spoken, but a motion of Bestor's hand caused the blacks to pull away and the escaped prisoner remained silent.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CONFESSION.

HAVING seen his boat depart the sailor went up to Toby's shop and knocked three times distinctly.

"All right," and Toby quickly opened the door.

"You saw them Toby?"

"Yes, Master Frank."

"They will be there?"

"Indeed yes, sir, for I hinted there might be a little pay in it for them, and gold catches every time, Master Frank," and Toby laughed at his own conceit.

Then Frank Bestor walked rapidly on through the deserted streets and soon came to the path leading along the shore to his cottage.

Following this he soon came near the cottage and stopping on the shore, hailed, for a dark object off in the water told him his gig was there.

An answer came, and after a few words of instruction the sailor went on to the cottage, took up his disguise and replaced it.

Then he sat down to wait the coming of Toby and his friends.

He soon after discovered them approaching, and they came in a gingerly sort of way as though they did not like the surroundings.

As they reached the little gate Frank Bestor stepped forward and said:

"Come in, gentlemen, for it is here you are wanted."

"Who are you, my man?" and the town justice adjusted his spectacles and tried to discover the face of the sailor in the darkness.

"I am one who sent for you, gentlemen, to make a confession.

"I possess a key to this cottage, so we will step in where we can have a lamp and do a little writing.

"You, Mr. Scott, I wish to have take down a confession which can be attested before the judge while Toby can sign it as a witness."

"This is a very strange proceeding, sir," said the lawyer pompously.

"Yes, passing strange," echoed the judge.

"It is a strange case, gentlemen—Ah! we can enter now!" and Bestor threw open the door.

The room was just as it had been upon his former visit, and a light was soon found and some writing materials placed upon the table.

Both the judge and the attorney eyed the sailor sharply; but he held back out of the light and said:

"Be seated, Lawyer Scott, and write what I tell you."

"I suppose I must comply," and the attorney seated himself at the table, placed the paper before him and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Judge, sit there, and you, Toby, take that chair."

The two obeyed, and standing well back in the shadow, the sailor continued:

"I hereby confess that Gregory Vance fell by my hand."

All started, and the judge was about to speak when Bestor said sternly:

"Pray do not interrupt me."

"Have you written what I have said, Lawyer Scott?"

"I have."

"I came into this port on the night of Gregory Vance's death, landed here and was met in the yard of this cottage by the deceased and Carter Weston, who accompanied him."

"I knew that Gregory Vance had ruined my father, I knew that he had persecuted my mother until he broke her heart, and he wronged me most cruelly, and I sought revenge."

"I challenged him to meet me as man to man, yonder in that yard, with what weapons he chose to select."

"It was bright moonlight, we fought with rapiers, and Carter Weston was a forced witness to our duel."

"Vance told me that he would kill me."

"Instead I ran him through the heart and went my way, again a wanderer through the world."

"Only a short while ago I saw by a Boston paper that Carter Weston was sentenced to die on the gallows for the murder of his brother-in-law."

"I came here to save him, and have done so, for I took him from the jail!"

"Broke jail?" cried the judge.

"Oh, no, for Seth Saunders opened it for me; but he will tell his story."

"Here are the keys, and you will find Seth Saunders and his two assistants locked in a cell."

Stepping up to the table the sailor added:

"Now I will sign my confession."

Taking the pen he wrote his name in a bold hand.

"Frank Bestor! No, you cannot be Frank Bestor, for he was a young man, and you are—"

"A young man," and as the sailor spoke he drew off the disguise he wore and revealed himself as he was to the surprised judge and lawyer.

But the sailor did not wait for them to speak, but said quickly:

"Now this confession is to be witnessed and signed, and you, Lawyer Scott, I think can place it before the governor to get his pardon for Mr. Carter Weston, when he will return to his home."

"Yes, this can be readily done; but against you, Bestor, will stand the two charges of having killed Gregory Vance, and also broke into jail to rescue a prisoner."

"Let them stand against me, for I ask no mercy from the law, no pardon from the governor."

"I did not break into the jail, as I told you, but had I not been able to enter it as I did, I would have broken into it."

"By so doing I saved the life of a man sentenced to death for a deed he was guiltless of."

"Now I will say good-night to you, gentlemen, and if you will kindly go to the jail and release Seth Saunders and his men, I will be obliged to you."

"We will go at once, sir; but—"

The judge paused, and Frank Bestor asked:

"But what, judge?"

"I do not see, as an officer of the law, how I can permit you to go free."

"My dear sir, what can you do in this matter?"

"I shall have to arrest you."

The sailor laughed, and getting red in the face, the judge continued:

"And if you resist, sir, I shall have to call upon my friends here to aid me."

"My dear judge, a man occupying your position should not be silly."

"Ahem! how dare you, sir?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Simply that I am no fool to place myself in a peril from which there is no escape."

"I know what I am about, judge!"

"You mean that you have help near?"

"Don't force me to show what I mean, sir."

The judge was angry, but he was also a very cautious man, and he turned toward Lawyer Scott.

"I think, your Honor," said the attorney,

"that we have done all we can in this matter."

"We have here the confession signed, properly witnessed and sworn to, of Mr. Frank Bestor, that he killed Gregory Vance, and it has saved the law from making an appalling mistake."

"The gentleman has done his duty in the matter, so we can only go our way and let him go his."

"But do you think he has help near?"

"Shall I prove it, sir?"

"Well—?"

"Listen!"

He stepped to the door as he spoke and gave three sharp whistles.

Instantly they were answered from a short distance away.

"You hear, judge?"

The justice did hear and he said nervously:

"I think we had better go."

"Come, Scott, come, Toby."

The sailor laughed and accompanied them to the door.

There he bade them good-night, and as they hastened away he locked up the cottage and soon after was in his gig running out to the schooner.

Five minutes after his arrival on board, the Sea Shell spread her snowy wings and stood out of the harbor with no lights visible on board, and unseen in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AFTER THE RESCUE.

THE little seaport on the Massachusetts coast awoke to a scene of excitement, on the morning after the visit of the Sea Shell to its harbor.

The judge, lawyer and Toby the locksmith had gone directly to the jail, after leaving the cottage.

They had met no one in the deserted streets, and went on to the jail at a rapid pace.

Arriving there the lawyer, who had the keys which Frank Bestor had given him, opened the outer gate after a short while in trying and they entered the building, proceeding to the cell where the three keepers were in a state very easy to imagine.

Seth Saunders was mad clean through, and took the joke of the judge about being caged with a bad grace.

Seth, when he could command himself told the affair as it occurred, adding:

broad-shouldered, dressed in white with skull-caps o' ther same, bare-legged, bare-footed and bare-armed.

"Lord, but they was a fierce lookin' lot, and I do believe that the prisoner they rescued was scared of 'em."

"As for strength, why I could no more move in their grip than a child could in mine, and the white leader talked to them in the most unchristian language I ever heard."

"I tell you, this is a bad night's work."

The jailer, however, was glad to know that Carter Weston was not to be hanged, being innocent, and read the confession of Frank Bestor with the greatest interest.

"Now where is he?"

That question no one could answer.

"Wonder if he's at the cottage?"

"We left him there," said Attorney Scott.

A consultation was then held and it was decided that Seth Andrews, one of his men, Attorney Scott and the constable, whom they would call for, should go to the cottage, for if to be found the daring rescuer of Carter Weston would be arrested.

If he could not be found by the time of their return it would be daylight, and the news of the night's work should be made known.

Of course Frank Bestor was not found, and while the story of the midnight rescue spread over town, Attorney Scott mounted his horse and rode up to the Weston Mansion.

Miriam had just finished breakfast, when the servant told her that the lawyer wished to see her.

She went into the library, pale, but very beautiful in her robe of mourning, and greeted him with some nervousness, for she expected he had come to talk about her brother, over whom the shadow of the gallows had been hanging.

"Mrs. Vance, I have made an early call, but you will pardon it I know, when I tell you that I am the bearer of good news."

"Good news to me?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, for it has been proven that your brother is not guilty."

"I knew that all the while, as I knew that the law was going to murder an innocent man."

"But thank Heaven for what you tell me, and let me know when this decision of poor Carter's innocence was decided upon?"

There was some bitterness in her tone, but she knew how Carter had suffered and that he was but a wreck of his former self.

"It was not decided upon, but decided for us, as he was rescued from prison."

"My brother rescued from prison, Mr. Scott?"

"He was."

"Did he break jail, as I believe you call it?"

"No."

"But made his escape in some way?"

"He was rescued, Mrs. Vance."

"Rescued? When and by whom?"

"Last night about twelve o'clock, and by the one who killed your husband."

"Frank Bestor?"

She almost shrieked the name and sprung to her feet in her intense excitement.

"Yes, he came into town last night, either by land or water, but which, no one is sure, though a fisherman saw a strange schooner, which appeared to be armed run in to an anchorage last night, and she is not in port this morning."

"At any rate the rescuer, Bestor, went to the jail, gained possession by strategy, professing to have some mutineer prisoners, and Seth Saunders and his two assistants were seized—"

"Not killed, not hurt! No, no, no! not that?"

"No, they were not harmed in the least; but those who accompanied Bestor were giant blacks, to whom he spoke in an unknown tongue."

"Saunders and his men were locked up in a cell, your brother's irons were unlocked and he was half carried, as he was very weak, out of the jail, but where no one knows."

"Then Toby the locksmith came after Judge Gore and myself, telling us that an old sailor had a confession to make of life and death, and we were to go to the Bestor Cottage."

"We went and the sailor was there, and he told of his coming here one night, and, as your husband—Pardon me, Mrs. Vance, if I wound you."

"Do not think of that, sir, but pray continue your story."

"He said that your husband had cruelly murdered his father, and his mother, and had also done him a great wrong, and so he challenged him to meet him, and in the duel he had killed Mr. Gregory Vance."

"This confession I took down, the judge swore him and Toby witnessed it, and he also stated that he had seen a paper in which he discovered that Carter Weston was to be hanged for the murder of Gregory Vance, so he had come at once to rescue him, make his confession, and keep your brother hidden until the governor pardoned him."

"For a crime he had not committed."

"True, but it is a mere form, you know."

"Well, to your story, please."

"The man, whom we believed an old sailor, then signed the paper, removed his disguise and we saw that it was Frank Bestor himself."

"And where is he now?"

"No one knows."

"And my brother?"

"With Bestor, wherever that may be."

"And he came here to save my brother from the gallows?"

"He did."

"He is a noble fellow; but have you more to tell?"

"Only that he gave me the keys of the jail, asked me to release Seth and his men and then to go to the governor with his confession, and I shall start at once."

"I wish you would; but is this story known in town?"

"The town is wild over it, Mrs. Vance."

"It was cleverly done, was it not?" and Miriam smiled.

It was the first smile that had crossed her face in many a long day; but she felt that with her brother free, and Frank Bestor his rescuer, she could afford to smile.

That day the attorney started for Boston to see the governor, and it did not take long with the gubernatorial influence to cancel the charge of murder against Carter Weston, and the story of his bold rescue became the subject of general conversation.

But where were rescuer and rescued was the question that no one could answer.

CHAPTER XL.

THE PLEDGE.

WHEN Frank Bestor boarded the Sea Shell, he at once gave orders to his savage crew to get the vessel under way.

Sail was soon set, the anchor up and the pretty craft ran out of the harbor, setting full sail after she reached the offing, where it would not attract attention.

The wind was fair and fresh, and her course was laid down the coast so as to run parallel with the land and some twenty miles off-shore.

Having gotten his vessel on her course, Frank Bestor left her in charge of a sable helmsman and went below.

The cabin lamp revealed the rescued prisoner seated in an easy-chair, his face buried in his hands.

Neptune had given him some food and wine, of which he had partaken sparingly, for his thoughts seemed to be far away.

At the step of the sailor he looked up, just as Bestor, believing him to be asleep, was about to retire from the cabin.

He rose slowly, for he was weak, and extended his hand, while he said with deep emotion:

"Frank Bestor, will you take the hand of a man who bitterly wronged you, and whose heart's full gratitude you now have?"

"Certainly, Weston, I will take your hand, and will say let the past be forgotten."

"I cannot forget."

"Be seated, my dear fellow, for you are as weak as a child. Here, drink a glass of wine with me, for it will revive you and we can have a talk together, after which you can seek the rest you need."

He poured out the wine and Weston drank it eagerly.

"Now tell me, Frank Bestor, how you came to forgive me, and then to save me from the gallows?"

"It is soon told, for I had no idea of your being accused of killing Vance."

"And yet I believed that you had planned it so that I should be accused."

"My God! did your sister so believe also?"

"I fear that she did, for she knew that you had every reason to hate Vance and myself."

"Vance you avenged yourself upon and I felt that your revenge upon me was to send me to the gallows."

"You wronged me in that, for it never entered my mind that you could be accused."

"By accident I saw a paper in which your trial and sentence was spoken of, and I at once hastened to rescue you."

"And nobly you did it."

"I am glad it was so; but having got from out of the law's clutches, I bad Judge Gore, Lawyer Scott and Toby the locksmith meet me at my mother's cottage, and there they were given my written confession of my duel with Gregory Vance, in which you served as witness."

"This was noble in you, Bestor."

"Not to do justice to a man situated as you were; but Scott is to go to the governor with my confession, and when all is arranged, I am to receive word in a certain way, and you can return home in honor."

"Heaven bless you, Frank Bestor; but what a joy this will be to my dear sister."

"Yes, for she loves you devotedly, I know, though pardon me if I say you have not done what you should to deserve it."

"I admit it; but that was in the past."

"I am a changed man now, Bestor, for God only knows what I passed through and suffered, and it has purified me, I pledge you my word."

"From this day I am another person, and Miriam shall see that I appreciate the noble sister that I have, for through all she clung to me with devoted love."

"I am glad to hear you say this, Carter

Weston, and I shall be deeply pained if you break through with your noble resolves."

"I will keep my pledge and there is my hand on it; but now tell me of yourself."

"Ah, Weston, there is little to tell."

"I never saw a man handle a sword as you can, and I am a fine swordsman myself, but was no match for Gregory Vance."

"Why, you played with him."

"Where did you learn such masterly work?"

"I have been a roamer and in foreign service."

"I went away to win a fortune, and I did so, but your sister's hand was given to another."

"That other I killed, so between us there is a gulf, and I go my way alone in the world once more, for my mother is dead, and no tie holds me to the dear old home now."

"And this beautiful vessel; is it yours?"

"It is one I got from an old friend to come to your rescue in when I found you were to be hanged for my act."

"A private vessel?"

"Yes, an armed yacht that was built by a wealthy Southern planter for his own pleasure-cruising, and manned by his own slaves, whom he got from an African slave-trader."

"They speak no English, but make excellent sailors, and are well trained."

"They seemed so."

"The steward and the cook, Neptune and Gridiron, are American negroes, so what you wish ask Neptune for, as they speak English."

"Thank you."

"But now let me ask you if you mind a voyage with me of a couple of weeks until you can recuperate and I get the letter I referred to about you?"

"I should be most glad to go, and it will build me up in strength and health to be with you in this charming vessel, for your wine is the very best, and the supper served me was excellent."

"Ah, yes, the planter of whom I spoke lives like a prince."

"But I will head for the Maine coast, and after a cruise of a couple of weeks return."

"Now, that is your state-room, and I advise you to go to bed, for you need rest, while I can supply you with what clothing you need."

"You are very kind."

"Good-night, and we will breakfast together at nine," and the sailor left the cabin.

Neptune was asleep, and so was Gridiron; but they quickly arose when an African sailor came after them and motioned to the deck.

"Neptune, I wish you and Gridiron to hear what I have to say."

"The gentleman in the cabin is my guest, and you are to treat him as you do me; but remember, this vessel is the property of a Southern planter, to whom you also belong, and he lets me have it to come on this cruise to rescue my friend."

"Any different story from this will cause you both to dance in mid-air with a rope around your necks."

"Do you understand?"

They did.

"You both speak English, so beware, if asked any questions, for if you do not remember what I have told you, I will see that you are promptly hanged, as I said."

"Breakfast at nine—you can go."

They went with an alacrity that made Frank Bestor laugh.

CHAPTER XLI.

TOBY RECEIVES A LETTER.

THE excitement of the rescue of Carter Weston by Frank Bestor from the gallows, was more than a nine-days' wonder in the little seaport.

It was talked over again and again, and the bold act received a great deal of praise.

Bestor was remembered as a bright lad, a gallant young sailor, and one who had nobly aided his mother, when, after the death of his father she was left a widow.

His many brave deeds, and they were indeed many, were recalled with pride, and that Seth Saunders had been given a taste of his own medicine seemed to be a good joke.

The duel was looked upon as a fair one, under the circumstances, for it was not unknown to many that Gregory Vance and his father had financially ruined the Bestors, and that he had also persecuted the widow.

That Gregory Vance had married Miriam Weston, when she was pledged to Frank Bestor was also known to a few, so that the sailor found himself considerable of a hero in the town where he dared not set his foot and have it known.

Many who had condemned Carter Weston and asserted that they knew he was guilty, now tried to hedge on their expressed opinions and say that it was wholly a case of circumstantial evidence.

He was unpopular in the town, and so he had had no sympathy; but proven innocent many were anxious to see him return, he having atoned for his past by the suffering he had gone through.

A number called upon Miriam; but she had not forgotten how they had vowed she swore falsely to save her brother, and she received but very few and toward those few was by no

means demonstrative in her friendly regard for them.

The attorney, armed with satisfactory papers had returned, and had communicated the fact to Toby the locksmith, who had become a great hero from his connection with the case.

Just what that connection was no one seemed to know exactly, but it was supposed that he was in league with the hero, Frank Bestor.

Never before in his life had Toby been so busy.

It seemed as though every lock in the town was out of order, and he was sent for to fix them, going to the houses of the gossips where they could get a full swing at him.

Toby was not a poor man by any means.

He had turned numberless honest pennies, and his prices now increased with his importance, and not a demurrer was heard, for what he did not care to tell as to his knowledge, his inventive genius fully supplied, and there was ample food for thought among the gossips.

So matters stood some two weeks after the rescue, and Toby, after a hard day's work with tongue and hands, was seated in his little shop counting over his increasing capital.

Suddenly a form darkened his doorway.

"No locks fixed to-night," said Toby, naturally thinking it was a caller for work to be done.

"I brought you this letter, sir."

The speaker was a lad, and as he spoke he took from his pocket a letter.

"You are a locksmith, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, the only one in town," said Toby proudly, trying to remember who the boy was.

"Your name is Toby?"

"It is, my boy."

"Toby what, sir?"

"My name is Tobias Keys, a fitting name for a locksmith, my lad."

"Yes, sir, and you are the man I came to find."

"Here is the letter, sir."

Toby took the letter and opened it with the air of a man who had a duty to perform and that duty a difficult one.

"Where do you live, lad?"

"Down the coast, sir, a couple of leagues."

"And where did you get this letter?"

"From a gentleman, sir, who landed at my father's fishing cabin in a boat this afternoon, and gave me five dollars for bringing the letter to you."

"Good! now to see if there is any answer to this note."

Toby glanced over the note slowly, for his acquaintance with handwriting was limited in the extreme.

But he figured out:

"Come to the cottage at nine to-night, with what news you have."

There was no signature, but Toby knew the writer was Frank Bestor, for from no one else did he expect a letter, being a bachelor and alone in the world.

"Will you see the one who gave you this, my boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"That I will not tell."

"Ah! well, tell him I will be there."

"He said you were to give me an answer."

"Ah yes, I had forgotten that."

"Did he say what it was?"

"No, sir."

"Give him this," and Toby handed to the boy a key.

"Yes, sir."

"And this is for you," and a half-dollar was slipped into the hand of the lad who at once took his departure.

The path he took was along the beach, around the cliff and thence on down the coast.

A walk along the sands of half a dozen miles brought him to an inlet with a narrow entrance and bold and rocky shores, rising to a considerable height and with cedars and pines covering the tops.

The country thereabout was barren, the shores almost wholly uninhabited, except here and there a fisherman's cabin being visible.

The lad rounded the point of land that formed the inlet and gave him a view of the basin wherein lay a schooner at anchor, her topmasts housed.

It was nearly dark when the lad returned to the inlet, and soon after he had gone out to the schooner a boat left its side.

In the boat were six black oarsmen and two white persons.

The former were from the Sea Shell's African crew, the latter were Frank Bestor and Carter Weston.

The escaped prisoner no longer wore the haggard look he had two weeks before, and his eyes were bright and sparkling, while, though still thin, as from an illness, he was wonderfully improved in appearance.

The boat, in the gathering sunlight held its way along the coast, close to the rugged shores, and the oars being muffled gave no sound as the black oarsmen sent it swiftly along over the waters.

A row of something over an hour and the boat was headed into the little harbor of the

seaport town where many of the scenes of this story are laid, and running close in toward the cliff a landing was made on some rocks and Frank Bestor and Carter Weston stepped ashore, going away in the direction of the cottage of Widow Bestor, not far distant.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RETURN.

As the two men approached the cottage one halted in the shadows of some cedars, while the other advanced alone.

At the gate he halted, and not long after he heard some one whistling.

The whistler whistled more vigorously as he approached the cottage, and there was no doubt but that his shrill music was made for a purpose.

It was not a signal, however, the purpose being to keep up his courage.

The whistler was Toby and he was impressed with the belief that a man who whistled was not frightened.

He might have fooled himself, but he certainly did not deceive the one who stood at the cottage gate.

"Poor Toby! he is scared half out of his wits," said that person, who was none other than Frank Bestor.

He stepped back in the shadow of some trees as Toby approached, and watched him.

The locksmith ceased whistling as he reached the gate.

It was not because he was feeling braver, but his lips had grown too dry to emit a whistle.

Toby felt as though his mouth was full of cotton.

"Lordy! but this is a spooky place," he said, aloud.

"If I don't see the widow's ghost a-chasin' Greg Vance's spirit around among the trees, I'm in luck, for this place is the hauntedest-looking spot I ever seen."

"I wish that Master Frank would come."

"I am here."

"Lordy!" and Toby nearly fainted as Frank Bestor stepped out before him.

"Don't take me for a ghost, Toby, for I am very solid flesh."

"How are you?"

"I'm all right, Master Frank, though a leetle surprised at your sudden coming."

"Surprised; well, I am glad you are not scared; but have you any communication for me from Lawyer Scott?"

"Here are the duckymints," and Toby handed a sealed envelope to the sailor.

It was addressed:

OFFICIAL.

"To CARTER WESTON, ESQUIRE,

"By the hand of

"ATTORNEY SCOTT."

"Well, Toby, you have done well," and Frank Bestor gave a low call, and Carter Weston approached.

Toby greeted him with an air of dread.

He did not know whether Carter Weston was aware how he could have sworn in his favor at the trial.

But Carter Weston greeted him cordially, while Bestor said:

"Toby brought this letter, Weston, and you can read it by my lantern," and he opened a dark lantern.

Breaking the seal, Carter Weston's face brightened as he read the contents, and grasping the hand of Frank Bestor he said, earnestly: "I owe this to you."

"I am glad to have done my duty and thus served you; but I must say farewell, and I feel that you will keep the pledge you made as to your future."

"Good-by."

The two men clasped hands, and Carter Weston turned and walked slowly away.

After a few words between Toby and Frank Bestor, the former departed for the village, evidently satisfied with his night's work, and anxious to get out of the neighborhood of the Haunted Cottage, as the widow's home was now called by the villagers.

For some moments Frank Bestor stood in silent meditation, and then he walked away, but not to return to his boat.

His way led up the cliff pathway to the ridge and thence he went on to the little cemetery of the town.

It was starlight and he readily found his way to the spot he sought, the little inclosure where rested the ashes of his ancestors.

With uncovered head he knelt by his mother's grave for full a moment and then took some flowers that had lately been placed there.

"She still brings flowers here, and keeps the graves in order."

"Heaven bless her," and he turned away from the sacred spot, the bunch of flowers in his hand.

He did not return the same way he had come, but took a road that led by the home of Miriam.

He turned in at the gate, made his way through the shrubbery in the grounds and approached the mansion.

In the library a bright light burned, and gliding upon the piazza he gained a position from which he could look within through the open window.

There sat Carter Weston talking to his sister, who, clad in deep mourning, was seated in an easy-chair near, listening with the deepest attention to what her brother was saying.

"She is even more beautiful than ever," muttered the sailor as the light fell upon her exquisitely lovely face, giving him a perfect view of her.

For a long time, as though unable to tear himself away, he gazed upon her, and then at last, with a deep sigh turned away.

Down the ridge path he went to where he had left his boat, and springing into it he rowed back to the cove where he had left his schooner.

Ten minutes after his arrival on board, the boats towed the Sea Shell out into open water, the sails were spread, and under a light wind the beautiful craft stood away from the coast, heading out into the broad Atlantic.

Frank Bestor had accomplished his work; but what was left for him to do then? Whither was the Sea Shell bound?

The sequel will show.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CLOUDS PASS OVER.

It was with conflicting emotions that Carter Weston walked toward his home, after parting with Frank Bestor at the cottage.

His thoughts went back over the past, and he recalled how Frank Bestor had saved the life of himself, his sister and others.

He remembered him as a daring, handsome lad, as courtly as a courtier, and devoted to his mother.

He recalled his love for Miriam, and how deeply she had loved the young sailor in return.

All the harm that had been done he had been the one to do it.

Selfish he had been, willful, wild, dissipated and a gambler.

His extravagances had well-nigh ruined his father and certainly his evil life had hastened the death of the old gentleman.

To extricate himself from financial difficulties he had sacrificed his sister, worked against the man to whom he owed his life, and had then, when overwhelmed with debt been glad to see his brother-in-law slain by the hand of Frank Bestor.

Then had come his arrest for the murder of Gregory Vance, his trial, conviction and sentence, and through all the noble devotion of his sister.

He recalled with a shudder the misery of his incarceration and the dread of the gallows.

He recalled that the man whom he had believed was avenging himself by throwing upon him the guilt of the death of Gregory Vance, had suspected no such *contretemps*, and when he knew what had occurred had boldly come to his rescue and taken upon his own shoulders the crime, if crime the death of Gregory Vance was.

He remembered how kindly Frank Bestor had treated him, and at last had returned him to his home in honor.

The sailor had gone, but whither, or what to do Carter Weston did not know.

There was a mystery about the man he had not fathomed in the weeks they had passed together on the Sea Shell.

He had urged Bestor to return and face trial for Vance's death, but he had said that he had work to do elsewhere, and so he had gone, with Carter Weston knowing nothing more of him than he had the night he had taken him from his cell in the jail.

Coming in sight of the mansion, Carter Weston paused.

A light was in the library, another in the upper rooms, which he knew were his sister's, and the hall lamp still shone through the glass crescent over the massive front doors.

His sister had not retired, so he hastened on and soon stood on the piazza.

The library window was open, and he saw his sister seated within.

Her face did not wear that anxious, frightened look which he had last seen there when she visited him in prison.

She held a book in her hand, but her eyes were not upon it.

She was lost in deep thought.

"Sister Miriam!"

She started at his voice, sprung to her feet, and leaping through the window, he stood before her.

She threw her arms about his neck, and thus the two stood for full a moment, neither able to utter a word.

The woman gained control of herself first, and said:

"Brother, welcome home—yes, a thousand welcomes."

"Back from beneath the shadow of the gallows, out of the depths of the grave, I may say I come, Miriam, for to-night one week ago I would have rested beneath the sod, an executed man."

"Do not speak of it, Carter!"

"I must; I must tell you that I owe it to the

noblest man on earth, the man I so shamefully wronged, Frank Bestor."

"And do you speak thus of him, Carter?"

"Can I say too much for him, Miriam?"

"See! here are the official papers that make me a free man, raise the stain of infamy from my name, and never again shall deed of mine bring a flush of shame to your face or a tear to your eye."

"God bless you, my brother, for those words!"

"I am glad to say them, Miriam, so glad to let you know that I am a changed man, that I realize how deeply I wronged Bestor, sacrificed you, and was my worst enemy, and now can atone for the past."

The woman was deeply moved by his words, for she dearly loved him in spite of all he had done against her.

She saw that the fearful ordeal through which he had passed had made his repentance sincere.

"Carter, where is Frank Bestor?" she asked, after awhile, breaking a silence that had lasted some minutes.

"He left me at his mother's cottage an hour ago, Miriam, to return to his vessel."

"His vessel?"

"Yes, for he came here to rescue me in an armed yacht belonging to some friend, a rich Southern planter, and manned by a crew of savages, real African slaves that cannot speak a word of English."

"And is his vessel in the harbor?"

"No, we ran into an inlet two leagues down the coast and came here by boat."

"There Bestor left me, as soon as Toby had brought me my papers."

"I saw Toby return to the town, and I believe Bestor went to visit his mother's grave, for he dearly loved her."

"Poor fellow," came from Miriam's lips, and then she asked:

"But whither is he going?"

"He did not say."

"Nor what he intended to do?"

"He spoke of some work to be done, but said nothing more."

"Was his friend, the Southern planter, with him?"

"No; but he must have the most perfect confidence in him, as Bestor had full control, and the crew minded him as I never saw men obey before."

"He spoke to them in their own language, and they seemed to revere him, though I should fear to trust myself with such a savage lot of devils as they appear."

"The yacht was stored for a cruise, and Bestor told me that the planter always kept her ready, while in a secret locker in the cabin was a quantity of gold, kept ready aboard for use by her owner, and Bestor had the key to it."

"Did he send no word to me, Carter?"

"Not a word, and in fact did not seem to wish to speak of you."

"Of course he cannot but feel that his act, in killing Gregory, divided your life and his."

"Yes, forever; but come, you are not wholly strong, in spite of the hospitality and care shown you on board the yacht of Captain Bestor, so you must have some supper and then retire, for to-morrow we will talk over business matters, and as I need an agent I would prefer you to any one else, so you will get a good salary and have a home here with me."

"You dear, noble girl, after all you paid out to keep me from the gallows."

"It was not very much to me, at least, for I am richer by far than I thought, Carter, and I will really need your aid."

She led the way to the dining-room, and an hour after Carter Weston retired to bed in his own room, which never again had he expected to see.

And bright and early Miriam was up, and her steps led her to the graveyard.

She saw the track of a man there in the newly raked walk around the grave of Widow Bestor, the imprint of a knee in the earth, and the flowers she had placed on the tomb the day before were gone.

Returning to the mansion she stopped as she walked near a *parterre* of flowers, for tracks crossed the soft earth directly toward the piazza steps.

The tracks were made by the same foot she had seen at the graveyard.

"He has been here, yes, and doubtless saw me through the open window of the library."

"Frank Bestor still loves me," and as she uttered the words her face flushed and she entered the house.

Her brother had seen her returning from the cemetery, but he did not know that she had not gone near the grave of the man who had been her husband.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A STRANGE QUEST.

THAT the Sea Shell did not return was sure proof in the minds of the dwellers in the vicinity of Castle Moro that she had been driven out to sea by the storm and sunk, or had been run out by the crew of blacks to save her, and had foundered with all on board.

In the mind of Don Moro there was another idea or two.

First, the crew might have gone to sea to save the vessel, and driven off their course, were unable to return, not being navigators.

He hoped, therefore, to hear of the vessel being met with somewhere in the Gulf and brought to port.

Another idea of the Don was that perhaps Neptune or Gridiron had learned to speak the limited African tongue, and had thus known of the desire of the savages to return at once to their homes.

In that case they were shrewd enough, these two American negroes, to make what capital they could out of the Africans, smuggle on board a couple of white men, and set sail, for they knew that the Don kept a very large sum in a secret locker in his cabin, and this of course they meant should be theirs.

Such were the Don's ideas of the disappearance of the Sea Shell, and he waited most patiently for news of her.

He sent word to New Orleans, Mobile, Pensacola and other ports to inquire of all incoming vessels if such a craft as the yacht had been seen; but hearing nothing of her as time passed on he came to the conclusion with the others, that she had broken from her moorings in the storm, been driven out into the Gulf and sunk with all on board.

Outside of the value of his beautiful vessel, and the gold he had on board of her, not to speak of the well-trained crew of African savages, he regretted the loss of the vessel for his own safety.

He did not know if he was wholly safe as Don Juan of Castle Moro, and hence the Sea Shell had been kept constantly ready for flight should he have occasion to depart in haste, while she was a craft that would certainly make a good buccaneering cruiser should he have to again raise the black flag.

"What I do I must do soon; but I will first have a duplicate vessel to the Sea Shell built, yes, and I will man her with a crew of my plantation slaves.

"They are nearly all of them good sailors now, and I will begin to drill them at once."

So the Don decided, and with him to decide was to act.

Orders were at once dispatched to the builders of the Sea Shell to turn out a sister craft to her with all speed, and out of the slaves on the plantation the Don selected a crew of thirty men, several of whom, having the luggers belonging to the place as freighters, were excellent skippers, for they carried cargoes to New Orleans and other ports.

Having thus made his arrangements for a new vessel and crew, and appointed two of his best men as first and second mates to drill his black sailors, the Don felt more at ease.

After months of delay the new yacht was completed, and if there was any difference between the two vessels it seemed to be in favor of the second craft.

The builder had fitted her out with no limit to expense, and then taking a crew on board had sailed for Castle Moro.

A pilot of the coast was called aboard and the yacht ran into the cove at night, and was seen at her anchorage in the morning.

Those who saw her thought that the Sea Shell had come back; but the Don soon made known to them that it was his new yacht, the Shark.

It was by no means as pretty a name, but it suited the Don, and the vessel was fully a match for the Sea Shell in beauty, while her cabin had been furnished at an utter disregard of expense.

The builder received his money, and the sable crew went on board and took charge.

After a short cruise to test his new venture and get his crew in practice, Don Juan gave an entertainment on board for a day's sail to his neighbors.

Of course the Grayhursts were there, and Mrs. Grayhurst was made mistress of ceremonies and right royally did she do her duty as such.

But there was one shadow upon the day of pleasure, and that was the presence on board as the Don's guest, of a young planter who, though once respected by all, had taken to drink, after his father had died and left him his fortune, and from bad to worse he had gone until he was cut by many and tolerated only by a few.

The Grayhursts had not wished to cut Shannon Vere, for such was his name, hoping he would end his ways, and they treated him with marked kindness.

But nearly all others gave him the "cut direct," and seeing him on board there came a cloud over the party, which the Don and the Grayhursts in vain endeavored to smooth away.

What the tie was that bound the Don and Shannon Vere together no one knew; but they had been the best of friends, and the young man was often at Castle Moro, though the master of that elegant home had never been known to go but once to the young planter's tumble-down establishment.

Some said that the Don loaned him money; but, be this as it may, Shannon Vere was deeply in debt, and yet, since the coming of Don Juan his creditors had not pressed him.

He did not, however, fit his home up, and it was rapidly going to decay, while the grounds were weed-grown and the fences in a most tumble-down condition.

Such was the man that Don Juan had made an honored guest upon his yacht, and well had it been for all if Shannon Vere had never set foot upon her deck.

CHAPTER XLV. THE SHARK'S CRUISE.

THE cruise of the Shark was a pleasant one, with only the presence of Shannon Vere to serve as a damper upon the spirits of all.

Feeling, by meeting in a gathering of his former friends, how thoroughly he was ostracized, Vere naturally sought those who had been friendly to him, and was approaching Mr. and Mrs. Grayhurst with at least a hope of a friendly recognition, when something he saw in the face of both caused him to hesitate, and the Don came toward him and said in a low tone:

"I have subjected you to an unpleasant situation, my dear Vere, but I had hoped, as we talked it over, you know, we could break down the barrier which your acts had erected between you and your old friends.

"On the contrary, all are against you, some with the bitterest hatred, and Grayhurst said to me but now, that he had tried to befriend you until of late he had discovered you to be an infamous scamp, and if you again entered his door, or spoke to himself or wife, he would cohida you."

The two had walked forward, and were alone on the forecastle of the yacht.

The face of Shannon Vere was very white at this, and he seemed about to break forth in anger and at once go and confront Gaston Grayhurst.

"He said this. Then by Heaven I will now dare him to—"

"Hold, young man!"

The grasp upon the shoulder of the young man was like an iron vise, and the Don's voice was deep and earnest.

"You are on board my yacht, and you shall resent no insults that your own acts have called forth.

"I am your friend, and have proven it, so take my advice.

"We are only out, as you know, for a day's cruise, and you remain with me to-night on our return to Castle Moro, and we will talk over matters, and I will do all in my power for you.

"Now, that you may not be made to feel unpleasant, keep forward, and the mate's state-room is at your service, and your dinner shall be served there, unless you wish to face all and not be recognized.

"No, I will do as you say, Don Juan; but some one shall suffer for this, I promise you."

"We will talk that over to-night.

"Now I will leave you, and all you wish for your comfort aboard order the steward to bring you."

"You are a true friend, Don Moro."

"I am glad you feel so toward me, for I am only anxious to serve you."

With this the Don walked aft, and, as he mingled with each group, he made remarks in this wise:

"You must pardon me, my friends, but I know really so little of the gossip of our neighborhood, that, excepting I deemed Mr. Vere a little wild and extravagant, I had no idea that he was in such a frightfully bad plight as to be cut by all his friends.

"I had hoped to help him up, you know; but he will keep to himself on the cruise, so pray do not let his presence on board mar your pleasure, I beg of you."

They were all glad to know that the young scamp would keep to himself, for there were fathers and husbands on board who would sooner have had a snake cross their thresholds than Shannon Vere, so well it was known that he was a perfect villain in everything.

To Mr. Grayhurst and his wife the Don expressed himself a little more freely:

"After what you told me, my dear Grayhurst, of what you had heard of him from a source you could not ignore, I treated him very coldly just now, and told him I made a mistake in bringing him on board, asking him to please keep forward and I would have his dinner served in the mate's state-room.

"I may be frank with you and say that there are some financial differences between us which prevent me at present from utterly casting him off, so you will understand it if I do not give him the cut direct."

"Oh, yes, but had I suspected that he was worming money out of you, Don Moro, I would have warned you that it was utterly lost to let him have it."

"No, for I happen to know of some secret wealth he possesses, but which he cannot use without a certain sum invested and I am helping him in that, so can lose nothing."

"But now let us drop this wicked youth wholly and turn to the enjoyment of the cruise."

The Don was soon voted as charming a host afloat as he was ashore by one and all, even to Shannon Vere, whose sensibilities had been so

much blunted in the past that slights had ceased to wound him deeply.

He enjoyed the splendid dinner served to him, drank deeply of the wines and then smoked himself to sleep on the forecastle.

There was a band of negroes among the crew, who played excellent music to entertain the guests, the dinner was most sumptuous, the wines of the best and in the twilight the ladies and gentlemen sung together, the Don charming all with his superb baritone voice, accompanying himself on the guitar, which he played skillfully, and singing French, Spanish and English songs new to the listeners.

At last the Shark reached her anchorage, and all, delighted with their cruise, departed for home.

All, with one exception, and that one was Shannon Vere.

He accompanied the Don up to Castle Moro where the butler was ordered to set before them a tempting supper, wine and cigars, and to see that the best spare room was in order for Mr. Shannon Vere, who would remain all night as the guest of the hospitable Don.

After the supper cigars were lighted and the two men adjourned to the library for a talk. The Don had a purpose in view.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"Now, Vere, we can have a talk together, and I expect you to be sincere with me if you expect my aid," said Don Juan.

"I look upon you as my friend, Don, and will be honest with you," was the reply.

"The only friend I have in this community, I may add."

"Let us see how we stand," and the Don went to his desk and took out a book of accounts.

"I loaned you one year ago five hundred dollars?"

"Correct."

"Three months after, though that was unpaid, I gave you as much more."

"True."

"In three months more one thousand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Others unpaid?"

"True."

"Another three months passed, money unpaid but gave you another thousand."

"Yes."

"Three thousand up to end of year."

"And five hundred three days ago."

"Yes, making three thousand five hundred you owe me."

"True, Don."

"Now you did nothing about paying off your mortgages, fixing up your home or squaring debts with this money?"

"I did settle a few debts."

"Amounting to just three hundred dollars."

"You know?"

"Yes."

"You certainly have not watched me?"

"My interest in you has made me discover just what you do."

"Ah! then what did I do with the balance of the money?"

"Gambled it away."

"You are right, but I had hoped to double, treble it."

"Yes, that is what people gamble for; but all you inherited, all your place first brought in to you, and what you have borrowed, has gone the same way."

"It has."

"Now, Shannon, you are to turn over a new leaf, if you wish my aid."

"I will be guided by you, Don."

"You say so now because you are harassed with debt, because you are to have your home-stead sold over your head, and you have no money to take up a certain note now coming due in bank, with signatures on it not written by the men who bore the names."

"My God! how know you this?" and the face of the young man turned pallid.

"It accidentally came to my knowledge through my agent in New Orleans."

"It is for two thousand dollars, and in ten days if you do not take it up will go to the supposed signers and you who presented the note will go to jail as a forger."

The man covered his face with his hands.

He had imprisonment before him at last.

He had reached the end of his rope.

If the Don did not help him he was doomed.

He looked appealingly at Don Juan, and then said:

"My God! what am I to do?"

"Let me see: drink and gambling and evil companions have been your ruin?"

"They have."

"Your parents left you a fine plantation, half a hundred negroes and some money?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your negroes are all mortgaged out but two, your place is under sale for non-payment of debt, and you have nothing."

"It is true."

"You are in a bad way, Shannon."

"I am, sir, a desperate way."

"Now I suppose you would lead the same life over again if you began afresh."

"Never! after the mortal agony I have endured."

"Are you in earnest?"

"From my heart, yes."

"Then sell that property on the Mississippi River you have said you found belonged to your father after his death, and which people here know nothing of."

"It is not worth anything, for I offered it and got an answer saying they would pay two hundred."

"So little?"

"It must be worthless."

"There are five thousand acres, but the agent wrote me it was all swamp land."

"Ah, and that you can do nothing with."

"You have never seen it?"

"No, it was not worth the trouble."

"Well, some day it will be valuable, so I'll consider it so now and give you a good price for it."

"You will?"

"Yes, I will do this to help out an idea spread around among my guests to-day that you had inherited some property and intended to pay up all debts, refit your home, buy your slaves back and again become an honored member of society."

"Would I be received if I did, and forgiven the past, even if such a thing were possible?"

"Oh yes, money would win, and it could be given out that that it was much more than it was."

"And it is possible."

"Is possible?"

"Why it would take forty thousand to square me as you know, fitting up my house and all."

"I will pay you that for your land on the river."

"You will pay me that?" and the young man sprung to his feet in wild amazement.

"Yes, and more, for I will give you fifty thousand for the land."

"You are joking with me, Don Moro."

"Not I."

"But you cannot be in earnest."

"Have you the old deed of this land?"

"I have."

"Bring it here to-morrow, for my attorney from New Orleans will be here, and he will draw up the deed, and you shall have the money."

The young man could not believe his senses, and sat like one in a dream.

At last he said:

"I will do it, but how I can ever repay you I do not know."

"There are conditions I demand, Vere."

"Conditions, sir?"

"Yes."

"Name them, for I say I grant them before I know them."

"You are not to get under the influence of liquors again for five years from to-night, nor to touch a drop to drink after this night ten days, so cut down your allowances in that time."

"I can do it."

"See that you do."

"I will."

"From to-night you are not to touch a card, or play a game on which a dollar is bet."

"I must give up all gambling, you mean?"

"All."

"I can do it."

"You can begin work on your place, get back your slaves, and fit your home up in handsome style."

"All you buy pay cash for; keep away from all people who snub you, but let them seek you when they see you are a changed man and rich; that will be your triumph."

"It will, indeed."

"Cut your old associates dead if they insult you, horsewhip them, but with a gentleman you will have to meet him."

"Keep this course, let people know you have money, let them see that you do not drink or gamble, have boldly cut your evil associates, and you will be looked up to within three months."

"I shall write these laws to bind you tonight, so you can sign them in the morning before you go, and I swear to you I shall watch you like a hawk, and if you break one pledge in the slightest degree I shall send you to prison on that paper, which I bought up myself, and upon other acts of yours I know you can be brought before the law on—one a most serious affair."

The young man winced, and said:

"You befriend me, and yet make threats."

"It is to save you—to make an honorable man of you once more."

"I shall not break my pledges, Don Juan; but what hold have you on me besides the forged note?"

"I will tell you."

And Don Moro drew his chair nearer in a mysterious manner.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A SPIDER AND A FLY.

"Do you remember some months ago a man was killed by the roadway, on his return home one night, Vere?"

"There have been a number of such occurrences in the past few years," and the voice of the speaker was tremulous.

"True, but I said the last few months!"

"You did?"

"Yes."

"Was it the overseer from the Burton place?"

"Not he, for that was nearly a year ago."

"I refer to old Planter Crossman."

"Ah yes, I was away at the time," and an ashen hue came over the face of Shannon Vere.

"So you were, you were away on a spree in New Orleans, from whence Mr. Crossman had just come."

"He was killed upon the highway near the Grayhurst gate on the back drive, and I was coming from Belle Eden that night, heard his groans, dismounted and found he was dying."

"He was not dead?" cried Vere excitedly.

"No, but died very soon after."

"He told me who he was, that he had been to New Orleans to collect his money due, and was shot where he fell."

"He was robbed, but recognized his murderer who had a dark lantern, and he called him by name and got a knife-thrust for doing so."

"Then the murderer mounted a horse near and fled."

"He died ere he told me more."

"And did he say who the murderer was?" asked Vere with forced calmness.

"Yes, and gave me his fob-chain, which he had grasped in his struggle with him, and the murderer knew not of."

"My God!"

"Well you may exclaim, Vere, for he accused you, and I have his chain."

"I found he was dead, so mounted my horse and rode on."

"And said nothing to criminate me?"

"No, I did not speak of having seen the body, and in spite of the reward offered, no one could get a clew to the murderer, who went to New Orleans and gambled away the money he had robbed poor old Crossman of."

"I was desperate, I—"

"All right, so long as you confess the act to me it is safe."

"I did not say—"

"No, no, but never mind, we will not speak of it, and all I ask you is to keep the pledges named and I keep faith with you."

"Break them and I will feel that you are irredeemable, care nothing for my friendship, and I will feel so imbibed toward one I regard as I do you, and have served as I have you, that I will send you to the gallows as surely as you are the murderer of old Crossman."

"Great Heaven, Don Moro, do you believe I can be guilty of breaking faith with you, you who have been as a father to me?"

"You ask me to give up drink, not to gamble and to cut my evil associates, and certainly I can do this without a regret, and make the dwellers on this coast yet be glad to have the friendship of Shannon Vere the Social Outcast."

"Do so, and you have your revenge."

"Yes, and sweet revenge it will be to me, while I will prove my appreciation of your goodness by my conduct and taking your advice in all things, my dear Don."

"Thank you; but Shannon," and the voice of the Don was soft and musical.

"What about this insult of Gaston Grayhurst?"

"Ah! he cut me, as did his wife, and said most unkind things about me."

"He certainly did, and I must be frank with you to say that I believe he has begun to suspect you of the Crossman murder."

"Then I am lost."

"Not yet; but we must handle this matter gently, and you must leave all in my hands."

"I will."

"He has not breathed a suspicion to any one, but he has certain ideas that will be ruinous if made public about you."

"Now what kind

"You could not be blamed for that."

"But come, let us see what you can do as a shot and with a sword, for I am somewhat accustomed to weapons myself."

The Don touched a bell, and a servant appeared, his special valet.

"Light up my practice gallery, Sable."

"Yas, massa," and the back disappeared.

The Don soon after led the way to a wing of the building in which there was a long gallery, a room, fitted up with a target, and around the walls of which were foils and other weapons, with weights to lift, and other means of developing the muscles.

Shannon Vere had never suspected the existence of such a place in Castle Moro, often as he had visited the place.

"Try pistols first, so as to have a steady hand."

"There is a target at ten paces; and Sable, give the gentleman a choice of those pistols."

Vere selected a weapon from a dozen of various styles.

"You selected my favorite; now see if you can equal my shots with it."

With remarkably quick aim Vere fired.

"Dead center, sah!" called out Sable.

"It may have been an accident—try again."

Shannon Vere smiled, fired even more quickly than before, and Sable sung out:

"Dead center, sir."

"Again, Mr. Vere."

Again a quick shot, and the report from the valet:

"Dead center, massa."

"Vere, you fire with remarkable quickness, and I only hope your shots are not accident."

"Try another pistol, and at fifteen paces."

The result was:

"Dead center, sah."

"Twenty paces now, with a third weapon, and see what you can do."

The shot was as quickly delivered, and the result the same."

"My dear Vere, you are a remarkable shot, quite as good as myself, I assure you, and that is saying a great deal, for you have been very dissipated, and received shocks to-night, both of pleasure at your good fortune, pain at your misfortunes—you understand—and have had a bad day of it, while you have shot with strange weapons, on a strange target, at different ranges, and by lamplight, all sufficient to upset your nerves."

"Now we will see what you can do with a sword."

Sable, who gave Vere a grin of admiration, brought a handsome pair of rapiers, and the two men threw off their coats for the sword test.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DON'S GENEROSITY.

SHANNON VERE took the rapier with the air of a man who understood what he was about.

He took graceful pose, and had a smile that seemed to indicate that he could show the Don something to astonish him with a sword.

The moment the blades crossed he felt that the Don was his match.

He saw that he was playing with him, and so he said:

"I yield, Señor Don."

"But why?"

"I never saw a man handle a blade as you can, sir."

"And you are swordsman enough to see I was playing with you, and let me add that you are most skillful, and would make a dangerous adversary."

"Yes, you will do, I see, so let us return and finish our talk, for it is growing late."

They returned to the library, the Don evidently pleased with his protege.

"Well, you need not fear to challenge any one, Vere, so I will go to Belle Eden for you in a couple of days; tell Grayhurst you feel hurt and angry, and expect an apology for what he said about you on board the yacht."

"I will tell him you have reformed, are going to devote some money you have inherited—we will put it that way—to the best of purposes, and hate to lose his friendship."

"If he consents, then all will be well; but if he refuses you have but one resource."

"Call him out."

"Ah yes, I fear so."

"And spare his life."

"Well, that is very dangerous work, you know."

"True; but what shall I do?"

"I like you, Vere, and I like Grayhurst immensely; but where the lives of two men are at stake, then I will not advise, and they must act; but I shall do all in my power to make it up between you, and if I fail, then the blame is off of my shoulders."

"You can do no more, and I feel that you will act for the best."

"I will, my boy; but now go to bed, for it is getting very late, and have a brandy and water, for to break off at once would unsteady your nerves, and should a duel come off, you will need a steady hand."

"After it, not a drop, remember."

"I will not forget, my dear Don," and Shan-

non Vere started for his room, escorted by Sable, leaving the master seated alone in his library, a strange expression, wholly unreadable, coming upon his face when his guest departed.

Half an hour after Sable entered to find his master still in his reverie, and announced:

"De plantashun lugger done arriv', massa, from N' Orleans, and bring de law gemman ter see you, sah."

"He comin' up de walk now, sah, so Peter done come up to say from de yart."

"All right, ask Mr. Dillon in."

A moment after Lawyer Dillon entered the library, and Sable bolted to get supper for him.

"I returned from up the river, Don Moro, and finding your plantation lugger about to leave her dock, came over in her at once to report to you."

"Glad to see you always, Dillon."

"Sable will have supper soon, and you can then retire, for you must be greatly fatigued."

"I am; but I found the lugger comfortable and enjoyed the run."

"What a beauty your yacht is."

"She is, indeed, and I'll send you back in her."

"I saw her by the moonlight as I came in; but let me tell you that what I wrote you about that river property I found to be pretty nearly true."

"That it is worth ten dollars an acre?"

"Yes, and more."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it seems that it belonged to some man by the name of Vere, Shannon Vere."

"So you wrote me."

"He bought it for a mere song, and put in the hands of the county treasury a certain sum to pay taxes for years, so as not to be bothered."

"That sum ran out, and the taxes are due, and in a few weeks it would be sold to pay them, for no one knows where this Vere is, and he bought it while on a hunt one day, it was said."

"And it is valuable?"

"Indeed yes, for the country has settled up around it, and there are some magnificent plantations on all sides, with a growing river town moving toward it and likely to take it all in."

"It is splendid land, covered with excellent building timber, and is worth to-day in cash a hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"This is great news indeed, and I will give you the money in the morning to go at once and buy it."

"The owner, as I told you, is in trouble financially, and to help him out, I offered him fifty thousand."

"He accepted, and would have taken far less; but this will be a world to him."

"I will have him go before breakfast to his home and get his original deed, his father's rather, and return here with it so that you can draw up all the papers and return to-morrow to make all things legal."

"Mr. Vere is now my guest, and we will all meet at breakfast; but there is no need of speaking of your having seen the land, as it may not, after all, prove so valuable."

"Oh, yes, I am sure of it; but as it is a property which he was willing to sell for a few hundreds as you wrote me, and you give him fifty thousand, you are most generous and he should be content."

"I think so, and if it proves more valuable I will pay him more for it in the end, so that he shall not suffer."

"That is generous of you certainly, Don Moro; but I suppose all your affairs here are progressing well?"

"Oh, yes, and you have conducted my affairs in your hands most thoroughly I can assure you, Dillon."

"But come, have some supper, and then we'll rest, for it is nearly morning."

The lawyer knew his host only as a somewhat mysterious gentleman, with no end of wealth, and for whom he had arranged some business matters.

He was paid fees without asking, in far larger sums than he would have asked and found his client a very companionable, high-toned man of honor, as far as he knew.

That he wore two faces he would not have believed.

He enjoyed his supper, pronounced the wines delicious and said good-night, when Sable showed him to his room, with the appearance of one who would still have lingered.

Then the Don wrote a note.

"DEAR VERE:—

"My attorney arrived unexpectedly last night, so as he has to return to the city by noon, I have asked Sable to call you at eight so you can ride over to your home and get that deed, and be back in time to dine with us at nine-thirty."

"Yours,

DON MORO."

"Give this note to Mr. Vere at eight, sharp, Sable," and so saying the Don retired.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PAPERS SIGNED.

SHANNON VERE was enjoying a refreshing nap when he was awakened by the servant giving him the letter from Don Juan,

He had gone to bed with excited brain and could not go to sleep.

His conscience would bring before him, in spite of the light he always kept burning in his room, the phantom of his one-time friend whom he had killed in a duel, and more still, the specter of old Planter Crossman.

Then his past evil deeds would troop before him like grim spirits and drive sleep away.

But the fortune that seemed to be already in his hand at last took possession of his brain.

He could not believe it at first; but the Don was no man to trifl, and he was the soul of honor.

"He has taken a wonderful fancy to me, perhaps because I remind him of a dead man, for that man has a history."

"Maybe he will adopt me."

With this pleasing thought, just as the Don and the attorney were parting for the night, Shannon Vere sunk into a deep sleep.

He started when awakened, broke open the note with forebodings, read its contents with delight and asked the time.

"It's just eight, sah."

"Order my horse at once, and I will be down."

He dressed rapidly, left the mansion, and was soon going at a gallop homeward.

It was a beautiful morning, and he felt in good humor.

He turned into the half broken-down gate leading to his home, and rode on.

The mansion had been solidly built, and if repaired was good for many years.

It seemed a sin to allow so fine an estate to go to wreck, as its young master had done.

A sad-faced negro took his horse, but was told:

"Don't take him away, Uncle Buck, for I go at once, and I think I can tell you some good news on my return."

"De goo' Lor' grant it, massa, for we all needs it," replied the gray-haired old negro, sadly, and he added:

"What hab happen dat massa didn't come home drunk, I wonders?

"But it's a fac—a solid truf."

Into the house went the profligate, and an aged negress met him with a courtesy.

She and old Buck were all that Shannon Vere really owned.

"Lordy, chile, I done thought you was had suthin' happen; but I has breakfast ready—Lor' to gracious! maybe you is ill."

"No, Phoebe; I am sober, that is all, and after remaining out all night."

"Is it not strange? But, dear old Phoebe, I have reformed!"

"Reformed! Dere, chile, doan' tell me yer had de impydince to git on your knees afore de Lord, 'cause nothin' else c'u'd reform yer, and I wonders at how you thought He would."

"I guesses I'se done worry Him so wid my prayers fer you, night an' mornin', that He jist sent a speerit inter yer soul ter git rid o' my beseechin'."

"Has yer been ter meetin', Massa Shan'on?"

"No, but I have reformed as you will see."

"Now I wish some papers, so give me my keys and I am going back to breakfast with a friend."

Phoebe handed up the keys, and as she walked off muttered:

"Wid a fr'en'; now dat poor boy hain't got but two fr'en's on 'arth and dem is Buck and me."

"He's a foolin' hisself if he thinks he hab fr'en's."

The library of Shannon Hall had once been elegant; but it was worn and seedy looking, yet still habitable.

It simply bore the stamp that rested upon all else within and without the place.

Securing the deed, Shannon Vere left for Castle Moro, after having brushed up his toilet, and arrived just as the Don and the attorney were going in to breakfast, for the master of Castle Moro waited for no one and it was half a minute past the time appointed for the morning meal.

"Come, Vere, I knew you would soon be on hand."

"Let me introduce my attorney, Mr. Dillon."

The attorney grasped the young man's hand, and the breakfast went off pleasantly and seemed to be much enjoyed by all.

After the meal the trio adjourned to the library and the Don said:

"Vere, as my attorney is to return to-day, I wished you to bring over the deed of that land you were willing to sell for a few hundreds."

"It is here, sir."

The attorney took the deed and glanced it over with critical eyes.

"All right, you desire me to attend to this for you, Don Moro?"

"Yes, to transfer it to me from Shannon Vere."

"While you

to the papers, then wrote a receipt for the money which he also acknowledged receiving.

Mr. Dillon wrote his name as witness, the money, in crisp bank notes of one thousand dollar denomination was counted out, and with trembling hands Shannon Vere grasped it and counted out some of the notes.

"This is what is due you, Dou Juan, on advances and for the sum you paid for a paper you took up for me."

"That is a past transaction Vere, so let all go as canceled, as it is forgotten."

"Then you mean all this for my worthless old land?"

"Yes, for I may make it pay me yet."

The Don showed that he wished to dismiss the subject, and as the Shark was to carry the attorney to the city, Don Moro said:

"Vere, why not run over in the yacht with Dillon and get workmen for your house and grounds, and purchase a lugger, which you will need, to bring them back in?"

"A good idea, Don, and I thank you."

"You can set them to work and then return for furniture after a couple of weeks."

"In the mean time I will see Grayhurst and arrange that matter, as it should be."

"I will, sir, if I may ask you to send my horse home and have the servant say to Buck that I will be gone some ten days or so, and to prepare quarters for a score of mechanics."

"I will see to it," was the Don's reply and half an hour after the Shark stood out of the cove with the two passengers on board and under the negro mates' command, who sent her flying along before a ten-knot breeze which promised to put her into the Mississippi River before morning.

CHAPTER L.

THE DON AS A PEACE-MAKER.

THE day after the departure of the yacht for New Orleans, Don Moro mounted his horse and rode over to Belle Eder.

He was greeted by Mrs. Grayhurst and Belle with pleasure, but the planter had driven to the village, yet would not be gone very long.

Estelle and her beautiful mother were charmed with their cruise on the Shark, only the little miss said:

"I think, Uncle Don, you should not have named so beautiful a vessel the Shark."

"The Sea Shell was such a pretty name," said Mrs. Grayhurst.

"I am superstitious I believe in little things, my dear madam, and feared to name my new vessel after one I had ill-fortune with."

"If I had only thought of it, 'My Estelle' would have been the very name."

"Perhaps I shall change it some day."

Estelle blushed, young as she was at the look and the compliment, and then the conversation turned into another channel, Mrs. Grayhurst remarking:

"I am sorry I was forced to act as I did toward one who was your guest; but you know, Don Moro, that after all we had heard of late, we were forced to drop him."

"I cannot blame you, my dear lady," was the answer.

"I have tried to befriend him, and I am sure he is now doing right, while he will now try and redeem his past, having received an expected inheritance of a considerable fortune."

"For his sake I hope he will do right, and not squander it."

"I believe that he will; but here is your husband."

The planter entered and welcomed the Don warmly, and soon after Mrs. Grayhurst and Belle left them alone.

"My dear Grayhurst, I come to-day on a most painful duty I assure you, and one I would not undertake were it not that I feel that I can arrange it, when in other hands it might be pushed to extremes."

"I think I understand what you mean, Don."

"Vere has challenged me?" and the planter was unmoved.

"He has, for he visited me with a view to having a meeting with you."

"I tried to dissuade him, using all the arguments I could; but he was determined, and I knew that he would do as he said, get one of his evil comrades to bear a challenge."

"Had he done so I would have horsewhipped the fellow bearing the challenge and let that be my answer to his master."

"As it comes from you, then I can but accept, for you would not represent any one you deemed not to be a gentleman, and you would have been the one to whom I would have turned had Vere not forestalled me."

The Don eyed the planter as though he would read his thoughts, for he feared there was a sneer in his tone.

But he said:

"Understand me, Grayhurst, this man considers himself insulted by what you said of him on the yacht."

"I was not discreet perhaps, nor careful of my words after all I had lately heard, mostly from you, Don."

"True; but I am fallible, and he vowed to me all said was untrue, and I felt I had wronged him, so took him along."

"There were those to cut him, and yet they were glad enough to let him know what you said, or send him word in some way; but could I find out who it was I would have something to say for betrayal of a host's confidence."

"Then, when he came to me I felt glad that he had gone to no one else, and so I wish to arrange it peaceably, for the young man has vowed to reformation; he will give up drink, gambling and evil associates, and a legacy he has just received, that was wholly unexpected, will make a new man of him."

"I hope so; but I do not believe any power can snatch that brand from the burning."

"I believe he can be redeemed."

"Well, he has been told that I said things against him, and he wishes me to retract?"

"Yes, and apologize."

"I cannot do it."

"Consider, my dear Grayhurst."

"Don Juan Moro, I am not one to slander any man; but when I speak, I know whereof I do so, an I will not eat my own words, thus giving myself the lie."

"I will meet this fellow, though I could refuse to do so on account of his infamous conduct, which places him out of the pale of the Code Duello."

"But I waive that, and if we meet, I shall go to the field with no mercy for him in my heart."

"I am sorry to hear you say so."

"I am sorry to have to do so; but I shall accept his challenge, simply, as he has forced this fight upon me, to remove an incubus from the midst of our homes along this coast, and then I will see if we planters cannot force to leave here that man's evil associates, who infest our village like wolves."

"You do not speak too warmly against them, Grayhurst, and I for one will help you."

"I have your answer, and it now remains but for me to see Vere on his return, for he is away in New Orleans, and get him to withdraw his challenge."

"It is immaterial to me, one way or the other, Don."

"If he does, we will see what he will do as to his reformation; but if he persists in a challenge, then I will be forced to act for him, and you may be sure you will have fair play at my hands."

"I am so sure of it that I shall ask you to serve me as my second, too."

"But, Grayhurst—"

"Nay, if Vere gives his consent do so; but if he refuses, then I will be forced to get some one else, and I care to involve no one in this wretched affair if it can be avoided."

"I will act upon your wishes; but may I ask if you have any preference for weapons?"

"I have none, for I have used weapons so little; but I am sure if he is a good swordsman I should be at his mercy, while as a pistol-shot I am not so bad, only out of practice."

"Practice then, for he will not be back for nearly two weeks, and you have the choice of weapons."

"This advice I give as your second, should I be," and with a smile the Don arose to depart; but he was urged to remain to tea and did so, for he seemed always to enjoy his evenings at Belle Eden, and certainly all there were glad to have him, and the servants were loud in praise of his generosity at every visit, and wished he would visit them oftener than he did.

CHAPTER LI.

THE GOOD WORK BEGUN.

THE plantation of Shannon Hall touched the coast at one point, the land being shaped very much as a triangle, the largest part being back from the shore.

There was a wooded point of land, shaped like a horseshoe, and with live oaks upon it, that formed a fine park of a dozen acres, and within the hook was an anchorage for small vessels.

Time was when the park was kept in splendid condition, a pretty arbor was near the shore, a trim wharf ran out, with a boat and warehouse on the end, and pleasure-boats were seen in the cove, while a winding road of shells led to the mansion, a quarter of a mile away, and then on to the negro-quarters in the rear.

But the planks of the wharf were decaying, the boat-house was tenantless, for the boats had been sold, the park was overgrown with scrub trees, the shell drive with weeds, and all was decay.

Some days after the departure of the Shark with Attorney Dillon and Shannon Vere, the pretty vessel returned, and the colored mate handed his master a letter.

It was from Mr. Dillon, and read:

"MY DEAR DON MORO: —I detained your yacht a couple of days, as you suggest'd, to see if our young friend was going to turn out as you hoped, or go again to the bad, by sailin' for a foreign land with the money you paid him in his pocket."

"I placed a detective on his track at once, and am happy to say that he went to the builders and employed carpenters and afterward secured painters, brick masons, plasterers, and landscape gardeners."

"Then he purchased for one thousand dollars a very creditable craft, and ordered her stored with a quantity of provisions for the workmen."

"Having had this report from my detective, I felt sure that he was to be trusted, so will start up the river to-night."

"I would say that Mr. Vere was most temperate on his run over, and as he dined with me, though knowing nothing of my being aware of his dissipated life and pledge of reform, was careful to touch but little wine."

"As I must catch the up-river boat, and thanking you for your hospitality, I remain,

"Very truly, DANIEL DILLON."

"The attorney does not know what I told against Vere to force his reformation; but he means well, or he would have left for foreign lands with that tempting sum of money, as I half-feared he would do."

"But he's all right, now, at least."

Such was the commentary of the Don on receiving the attorney's letter, and he sent word aboard the yacht for a night lookout to be kept for the lugger passing up the sound.

It passed in the night, entered the Hook at dawn and ran alongside the wharf.

Shannon Vere went ashore and up to the mansion, while the unloading began.

He amazed Buck and Phœbe by telling them that the old Hall was to be rejuvenated and great improvements made.

Then he rode to the village and secured a number of teams which he sent at once to get lumber for the wharf, and having seen the loads started almost took the breath away from the shopkeepers by going into their stores and paying the debts due them.

He demanded bills, be they ever so small, with interest to date, paid them promptly when received, and ignoring the obsequiousness of the shopkeepers, where before all had been bluster, he left them paralyzed at their good fortune and his.

His bills at the taverns were large, but were promptly paid.

"Have a bottle of wine, Mr. Vere?" said a landlord.

"No, sir, I have given up drink, and you need expect no more custom from me as far as liquor is concerned."

As he left the bar one of his "pals" met him, for he could be called nothing else, as they had drank, gambled and done many wild deeds together.

"Hello, Shan, boy, you must have held trumps right along in ther city to be nagged out as you is."

"Treat us fellers ter some bottles, boy."

Shannon Vere was passing him without recognition, and the loafer grasped his arm.

"See here, is yer luck made yer a gent too big ter speak to yer old chums?"

"Shriver, I have had fortune, but not by gambling for it."

"I have more than I ever had before and I am going to be a man with it, and cut drunkenness, low companionship and all vices, and I include you among my list to ignore."

The words were spoken distinctly, fearlessly, and the loafer cried in a rage:

"Well, you look out fer me, for I takes no insults from you," and a blow was aimed at the planter.

It was cleverly turned and at the same instant a stunning right-hander sent the man flat on his back, while Shannon Vere walked coolly on.

"You have a mortgage against my house, Lawyer Palafox?" and Shannon entered the office of a man who had pressed him hard.

"Yes, and I shall give you no longer time—"

"I do not ask it."

"Name your amount in full with interest, for having been drunk when I got the money from you, I know little of the transaction."

"Do you mean you want to pay—"

"Yes, so be quick about it."

The lawyer was amazed and disappointed as well.

He had expected to get the place for the little money he had advanced.

"It is of no consequence now, my dear Vere—"

"I say it is, or I shall put the case in the hands of Judge Vose at once."

Palafox was afraid of Judge Vose, so he quickly found the sum, received his money with full interest, gave up his papers, and seeing that his last question to the young man went unnoticed, added:

"If I can serve you in any way, Mr. Vere, I hope you will not forget me."

To Judge Vose the planter next went.

"Judge Vose, I have called, sir, to give you a list of my negroes who are now on different plantations, sold under pledge to give them back on payment of the sum given, their work during the time to stand as interest."

"Here is the list, here the amount of money needed, and I place it with you to make the payments and have my slaves sent at once to my plantation."

Judge Vose had been a warm friend of Shannon Vere's father, and he said:

"I am glad to hear that you have money, Shannon, and are spending it in the right way."

"I will at once attend to the commission for you, and report."

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your improved appearance."

"Thank you, sir," and Vere departed to purchase some stock for his place.

This done, he returned to the Hall to find the flooring of the wharf laid, the cargo of the lugger unloaded, and the men at work.

His slaves had begun to arrive from the various plantations Judge Vose had visited, and pleased with his day's work, Shannon Vere mounted his horse and rode over to Castle Moro to tell the Don what he had accomplished thus far.

The Don was on the piazza as he rode up, and the serious face he wore caused Shannon Vere to feel that something had gone wrong.

CHAPTER LII.

ALL GOES WELL.

"WELL, Don, I am back again with a fine lugger, that is at anchor in the Hook, and I have done a big day's work," said Vere with enthusiasm.

"I am glad to see you back again, and would like to hear of all that you have done, Vere."

"I will tell you, my dear Don; but how serious you look."

"It is on account of my visit to Belle Eden, and the fact that you will have to fight Grayhurst."

"Ah! is that all?"

"All! a duel is no slight matter, Vere."

"True, sir; but if it must be it must, or you could have arranged it."

"I tried hard; but to your doings first."

"Well, I bought a fine lugger, cheap for cash, and I got several landscape gardeners, carpenters, masons and plasterers with all that was needed to begin work on the Hall and grounds.

"I went to the village to-day and paid every dollar I owed, then took up my mortgage from that disappointed old rascal Palafox, and placed with Judge Vose the money to buy back my negroes, and two-thirds of them have already returned to the place.

"I have bought lumber, wagons, horses and stock to begin with, and to-morrow set the men at their respective work."

"Have I not done well, sir?"

"You have indeed; but have you any money left?"

"Oh, yes, though I paid my New Orleans debts while there, I have spent a little over half what you kindly gave to me—"

"For your river property."

"If you will have it so, Don; but I can pay my workmen, furnish my home and still have a snug sum to live on until the place begins to pay."

"You have done well, Vere, and I wish you every prosperity."

"Now we will talk over the affair with Grayhurst."

"Certainly."

"I went to see him and told him how you felt about what he had said about you, and you hoped that he would retreat and offer apology."

"His reply."

"That he knew whereof he spoke, had no retraction to make, and certainly no apology."

"I see."

"I then told him I must challenge him for you."

"And he accepted."

"As I brought the challenge, he coolly said, it was guarantee that I believed you a gentleman, and he would meet you; but had it been another second, one of your late comrades, he would have dealt differently with him."

"Kicked him out, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

"Well, we are to meet?"

"Yes, unless you care to withdraw your challenge."

"Not I."

"Then a meeting must occur."

"When?"

"I will see him as to that, now you have returned."

"And as to place and weapons also, he having choice as challenged party."

"Certainly, and the sooner it is over with the better."

"Yes."

"I will see him, then, to-morrow."

"Pray do so, and all arrangements you may make, Don Juan, will suit me, I assure you."

"There is one thing he said that makes a little trouble in my mind."

"What is that, pray?"

"He said that bad I not come as your second, he would have asked me to serve him."

"I would not give you up, Don."

"Nor would I wish it; but he said the affair need not be witnessed by others, unless 'twere a surgeon, of one, or both, and that he would come to the field alone and have me act for both of you."

"I certainly am willing, if you are to act, and he to have you."

"But the proceeding is just a little off, I think."

"True; but if all are willing, we can arrange it so."

"I know what you can do, and I doubt not

the result of the meeting," the Don said, casually.

Some further conversation was held upon the subject, and dinner being announced Vere accompanied the Don in to dine sumptuously, for he knew that such a thing as an indifferent meal at Castle Moro was never known.

Having remained an hour after dinner Shannon Vere mounted his horse and rode home, the Don promising to come over the next day to see him after having been to Belle Eden.

Reaching Shannon Hall, which had been the old home of his mother's family, the young planter found that Buck and Phoebe were in their element.

They were as delighted as though the Millennium had come, at the change that had seemingly dropped down from the skies upon Shannon Hall.

Phoebe as housekeeper, and Buck as butler, felt that they were now to live again.

Master Shannon had returned to life, it seemed, and the old house was to be again what it had been in the past.

The returned negroes as they came were welcomed with open arms by the old couple, and in spite of all his faults, the negroes had always loved their young master.

Buck and Phoebe had been true as steel to him through all his wild carousals and desperate acts, and now they were to reap their reward as they deserved.

They could hardly believe their senses.

When he came back to his home that night, Vere found a negro to take his horse.

"Is that you, Uncle Buck?"

"No, sah; I is Bobolink, who you sold to Mister Marsey."

"Ah, yes, Bob; I'm glad to see you back, and you can take the stables again."

"Thank you, sah; and I is almighty pleased to git back."

And Bobolink led the horse away to the stables, while his master ascended to the piazza.

The mansion was lighted, supper was set in the dining-room, and there were flowers in vases here and there.

Buck already had his assistant in the harness, and he was also to act as Shannon's valet, while Phoebe had likewise drawn upon the returned force for a cook and house-girl.

The workmen brought over had gone to bed in one wing of the mansion, and, as all were tired with the excitement and day's work, the old couple were glad to see their young master eat his supper and retire at once.

A few moments after and Shannon Hall was in darkness and repose.

Then something occurred that was of a most startling nature.

CHAPTER LIII.

A BLOW TO AVENGE.

SHAW SHRIVER, the man whom Shannon Vere had knocked down, was not one to take a blow quietly, even if his hand to provoke it.

He had once been a gentleman, or at least born one, a circumstance that made him that much more a villain; for when one who does know what is right falls from a high position, be it man or woman, they become the very worst of sinners.

He prided himself upon the fact of his having been well born, and also upon his strength and skill as a fighter, and was ready to fight for the championship as bully of his crowd of loafers.

There were in the party into which Shannon Vere had drifted, and who had gotten about half of his fortune, several more just such fellows as was Shaw Shriver.

Then there were a number of "hard citizens" of the lower order of life, and the band numbered full a score, of which Vere had been nominally the head and front.

Nothing was too vile for them to do, though they pretended to be only gamblers, and organized themselves into a club.

So when the man they were bleeding most liberally returned, and Shaw Shriver was cut by him, then knocked down, and a slur cast upon the whole crowd, it was more than the bully could stand.

He went the rounds where he knew he would find his pals, some pretending to work, others idling, and called a meeting at their usual rendezvous, the house of one of the party, situated upon the shore of the bay above the town.

When night came on the men began to drop in one and two together.

Shriver was there to receive them, and called the meeting to order.

By a strange coincidence not one had heard of Shannon Vere's having done more than pay his bills about town.

His purchase of stores, wagons and stocks had not reached them as yet.

Some had heard that he even had the money to pay off the mortgage on his home and buy his negroes back.

"Now, mates, I have called you together to set things right, and set 'em going too," said Shriver, as he called the meeting to order.

"We have been like a band of brothers for a long time, and if one won money from another there was no kick."

"All was square and lovely."

"But there has been one who turned traitor this day."

"He is one whom we took to our friendship, and it's time he paid liberally for it."

"But he got a big inheritance unexpectedly, and more, it has turned his head, so that he became a fine gentleman at once."

"When he was poor, and lived off the niggers he sold, why then he was glad to drink and turn a card with us; but to-day he came back home with his inheritance in his pocket, and I spoke to him."

"You see on my face how he replied."

"He hit hard, and I went down; but not to stay."

"I am up again, as you see, and I'm mad and glad clean through."

"He told me that he no longer meant to associate with loafers, and men such as we were."

"The airs he put on fairly appalled me."

"Well, I let him go without knifing him, for I have a better plan for revenge."

"He paid to-day in town some two thousand dollars in small debts, squared them all up, and has the money in his pocket to take the mortgage off his home, and to buy back his niggers."

"You know this is no small sum, for it goes up high among the thousands."

"I was told by the best authority he had rolls of bank-notes with him, that went high up in amount, and he took them with him to his home."

"Now all he has there are two old negroes, and my plan is to take Ed's fishing-sloop here, wear masks, land on a boat on the outer shore of the Hook, for it would take too long to go round, and just pay Mr. Shannon Vere a visit."

"We can borrow his money, and if he resists to hurt us, we can knife him, and be back in our nests before dawn, for there is a good breeze to-night."

"If he has what I have heard he has, then it will be a clean thousand apiece all round, do you see?"

The gang did see, and they yielded to the idea with an alacrity that was worthy of a good cause.

Ned's sloop lay just off his cabin, the masks and other disguises, with their weapons, were fished out from their hiding-places, and the party went on board the little vessel.

The sail was set noiselessly, and the sloop stood directly off from the shore, burning no light, and with her dark sail and hull, all knew she would hardly be seen, unless some one was on the watch for her.

She went along almost noiselessly.

Not a block creaked, the sails held full, and her sharp bow made no ripple.

She seemed to have been intended for just such expeditions of deviltry.

Ned Ross, her owner, held the helm, and Shaw Shriver felt his importance as captain of the outfit.

At length Ned Ross said:

"We are off Shannon Hall now."

"Then run in," ordered Shriver.

"Into the Hook?"

"No, for that would take half an hour more going and coming, and we will only have a few hundred yards more to walk this way."

"Run in, anchor and we'll land in the boat in two trips."

This was done, and Ned Ross and a companion were left on the sloop.

Then the party, with Shaw Shriver valiantly leading, took up their march through the forest to Shannon Hall, half a mile distant from the landing.

They came in sight of the place, which they knew well, having enjoyed many a carnival there, and halted to consider.

One of the party, it was decided, was to go to the door and knock, and when he had response, was to say that he had some important news for Shannon Vere.

This would open the way for the others in disguise to rush in to the attack.

Having decided thus, the man went forward and acted as directed.

His loud knock at first brought no response.

Then came a voice from within:

"Well, who are you, and what is wanted?"

"Is that you, Mr. Vere?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"I have an important message for you, sir."

"Who from?"

The man's hesitation put Vere on his guard at once.

He had not expected this question, so was unprepared to answer.

"Who sent the message?"

"I have it here, sir. it's a letter."

In the mean time Shannon Vere had peeped through a glass that was broken, and saw the steps crowded with men.

"Wait until I get my clothes on, for I do not want to catch cold," he said, and hastily he ran back and aroused the score of white workmen with:

"I believe I am to be attacked for the purpose of robbery."

"Come to the grand hall silently, and await events."

Some of the men were armed, for in those days it was the custom to go prepared to meet a foe, and others hastily seized what were as good as weapons from their tool-chests.

It took but two minutes for Shannon to draw on his trousers and boots, seize a pistol and ancient sword and return to the door.

But the outsiders had gotten tired of waiting, and Shaw Shriver said:

"Break the door down, for we can't stay here all night, and he may be hiding his money."

CHAPTER LIV.

CAUGHT TWO TARTARS.

At the base of the steps leading up to the piazza the gang had noticed two long pieces of timber, and one of them was pressed into use.

With the weight of a dozen men upon it, one end was jammed hard against the door.

The stout door trembled, cracked, and the locks were loosened, stout as all were, under such rough treatment.

"Again, mates!" cried Shaw Shriver, and once more the blow was given, the door burst inward and the men, dropping the timber, rushed into the hallway.

They were met by two shots in rapid succession, then the cry:

"Let them have it, boys!"

The result was a shot from a musket, another from a shotgun, while half a dozen pistols were emptied in their faces.

Such a reception paralyzed them, and ere they could realize what had happened, Shaw Shriver was cut down by the old Revolutionary sword in the hands of Shannon Vere, who well knew how to wield it.

With yells of terror, and without firing a shot, the cowardly gang turned and fled, fairly tumbling down the steps, and disappearing in the dense undergrowth.

But for the fact that Shriver and one other were dead, and three wounded, blocking the hall, immediate pursuit would have followed.

But this delay, and then to quickly find which way the marauders had fled, threw Shannon Vere some minutes behind in the chase.

But, discovering from the sound of their rushing feet that they were going through the forest to the beach, the pursuers pressed on, workmen and negroes, firing random shots as they ran, which but quickened the steps of the flying scamps.

They reached their boat, crowded in all of them, for not for gold would any have waited for a second trip, and started for the sloop.

Ned Ross had heard the firing, and so got up anchor and set his jib to fly.

But he saw the boat coming and stood toward it.

It was gunwale-deep in the water, and pulled hard, while the waves broke in filling it rapidly.

Then the pursuers appeared on the beach and opened fire that rattled about them in a most frightful manner.

"Quick, Ned, quick! they are killing us from the shore, and the boat is sinking," shouted the helmsman.

Ned was doing all he could, and when a length away from the boat, just as he was luffing, it went down.

Half-frightened to death already, the men screamed lustily as the mass were thrown struggling in the water.

But they clambered on board the sloop after a short struggle, though two, who could not swim, went down before the eyes of their comrades.

Then the sloop sped away up the bay, only anxious to land the party. anchor, and wear her usual quiet look.

But suddenly there loomed up a sail.

It had not been noticed before and was now not half a mile away.

It was a schooner, that much was seen, and her sails shone like snow in the darkness, showing that they were new.

She was coming along toward the sloop under lower sails only, but she was making rapid work of it.

The sloop people did not like this strange vessel.

She had been near enough ashore to have heard the firing, and more, she was evidently chasing the sloop.

"This is a bad night's work," growled Ned Ross.

Not a soul dissented, and the wounded groaned an assent.

"Curse Shaw Shriver's desire to revenge the blow Vere gave him, for that's all he wanted," further growled the sloop's skipper.

"Hush, mate, Shriver's dead," said one.

"Then thers will be rejoicing in the village."

"And more are dead."

"Yes, and likely more to die."

"That's pleasant for us to hear," sneered one of the wounded.

But Ned Ross was in an ill-humor.

He did not fear to lose his sloop through the schooner, for he knew she could not be outsailed; at least such was the opinion of himself and her admirers, and in truth she was fleet as a deer.

He could run to the head of the bay where the

schooner could not come, and land at a patch of forest where he often went for a load of wood, and with two or three men pretend to have gone there the day before, while he could have the others take the wounded and hide them.

Such was his calculation, but in looking over his shoulder he found to his horror that the schooner was rushing after him like a gale of wind.

He already had the wind free, and with all sail set was delighted with her speed; but here, without setting topsails the schooner was gaining rapidly.

What should he do?

"I'll bluff 'em off, for they hain't no right to tackle us here," he said.

As he spoke he gave a jump, and so did all the others on board, the wounded even scrambling to their feet.

And no wonder, for the bows of the schooner had suddenly been lit up with a red glare, and the deep boom of a heavy gun was heard.

The shot flew just over the sloop's deck, and the hint to heave to was too decided a one not to be taken.

"It's the Shark—Don Moro's yacht," said Ned Ross, after he had brought his vessel to.

It was the Shark, and she rushed down like a tornado, her black crew at her guns, her commander on her quarter-deck.

"Ho, that sloop!" came in thunder tones which had, in a similar hail, been the death-knell of many a craft in the past.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Ned Ross.

"Who and what are you?" and the schooner luffed sharp and lay to a length from the sloop.

"An honest coaster, Don Moro, for I recognize your vessel.

"This is the Sea Raven, and I am Ned Ross, her skipper."

"You have been up to some deviltry to-night, so get into your boat, every man of you, and come aboard my vessel."

"I have no boat, sir."

"Then get under way and come alongside, and mind you don't knock the paint off the yacht with your clumsy craft, and if you attempt to dodge I'll blow you out of the water."

There was no alternative, and the sloop was soon alongside.

"Now, sir, whose mansion have you and your crew been raiding to-night?"

"You are rich, we are poor, and so you believe us thieves, Don Moro."

"No, no, but I was near you when your boat put off from the shore with men in pursuit, and I heard the firing."

"I have a good glass, and I saw more than you think, so tell the truth, or you all go into irons at once."

Ned Ross made no reply, and at an order from the Don irons were brought.

The band of bullies cringed at having to be ironed by negroes.

They had been terrifying the community by their deeds, and now this one man held them under his blazing eyes, unable to resist.

Quickly they were ironed, and then, with half a dozen of the black crew of the Shark on board of the sloop, Don Moro headed his vessel toward the Shannon Hall Cove, the Sea Raven in her wake.

CHAPTER LV.

HOW THE DON GOT THERE.

AFTER the departure of Shannon Vere for home the Don concluded that it would be best to see Gaston Grayhurst that night, and knowing that he and his wife were late sitters-up, he thought he would go over at once.

"I will sail over," he said, and so, sooner than a pair of horses could have been hitched up, the yacht under her nimble crew was ready and standing out of the cove.

The run was quickly made, a boat took the Don ashore, and Mr. Grayhurst, who had seen his vessel standing in, met him on the beach.

In a short while the two were seated alone in the library, for Mrs. Grayhurst, at a sign from her husband, had retreated.

Feeling by his late coming that the Don wished to see him particularly, he had motioned to his wife to leave them alone.

"I was in the town to-day, Don Moro, and was glad to learn that young Vere had paid all his debts.

"This is truly a step in the right direction, and the news of him told me of his return."

"Yes, he got back at dawn, and the fellow dined with me to-night, and he has paid his debts he told me, raised the mortgage on his place, bought back his negroes and has workmen engaged to repair his mansion."

"I am glad to hear this, indeed."

"But he is still in a combative mood, Grayhurst."

"I expected that, when he knew I refused to retract."

"Yes, he considered himself insulted by you, and says that he gave you a chance to retract."

"As I refuse he wishes to fight?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am ready at any time to give him the satisfaction he demands."

"I have been brightening up my pistol-shooting by practice, and do remarkably well."

"But for all that I am not preparing wholly for life, as I have made my will."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and confidentially, my will means more than one might think, as I will show you, if you care to hear, after we have concluded the arrangements for this duel."

"I should esteem it an honor to hear, sir; but first to the duel."

"I have the choice of weapons?"

"Of course."

"I select pistols."

"Good!"

"What time shall we say?"

"How about sunrise in the morning?"

"It will do; but where?"

"On the line, under the Giant Oak, that divides our places on the shore."

"A good spot, for we can drive there, or go in boats as we please."

"He agrees to my being second for both, and if you will engage Doctor Spotswood to serve as your surgeon, he can act as a witness to avoid all complications."

"I will send a note to him to-night, Don Moro."

"Perhaps it would be better to go in boats."

"As you please, sir, I am content with all your arrangements."

"Then I will sail from here over to see Vere to-night, take him home with me and be on hand in the morning."

"Very well; now let us dismiss this affair, and I will tell you what I intended," coolly said Gaston Grayhurst.

"I will listen with pleasure, my dear friend."

"Well, as you know, I am not of American birth, but English."

"I am, too, of a noble family, the Grayhursts of Grayhurst Castle, England, my father having been a lord."

"I had an elder brother, and a younger brother, the former a good sort of a fellow, the very one to manage the large estate after my father's death."

"My younger brother was a wild fellow, but I feared he was too reckless in his way, and after getting into a serious scrape one day he ran off to sea, shipping before the mast."

"Have you never heard of him since?"

"Yes, letters came home, once or twice for a year, saying nothing, however, as to what he was about, and since then I have not heard, but I hope he is well and prosperous, though I fear he is dead."

"I was educated for the Church, or rather was about to take orders, when I met the lady who is now my wife."

"I saw her on the stage, for she was a rising young actress then, and from America."

"I loved her, sought her acquaintance, gave up the Church and followed her to America, and she became my wife."

"My family tried to ignore the marriage, but it was of no use, so I gave up England and came here, where we have lived ever since."

"Our poor boy's sad death you know of, and if he were alive to-day he would be the heir to the title that belongs with Grayhurst Castle, for my father and elder brother are both dead, the latter dying childless."

"After my death, if I have no heir, my younger brother, if alive, will be the heir."

"Had my son lived, he could have assumed the title, if so he wished, and so it stands."

"I have left my will giving all of my personal property to my wife and Estelle, and, in case my brother does not return, there is a cousin who can claim the title and estates."

"Thus the matter stands, and if I fall under the fire of Shannon Vere, I will ask Mrs. Grayhurst to seek your advice in all things."

"I feel highly honored, I assure you, my dear Grayhurst, and shall do all in my power; but you must not think of death, but go to bed, get good rest, and be on hand in the morning refreshed and full of nerve."

"Now I will say good-night, for I wish to run over and get Shannon Vere, so we can be on the field on time."

With this the Don took his departure, sought his yacht and started away for the cove of Shannon Hall.

She was nearing the cove, when there came from the direction of Shannon Hall, the sound of firing.

"Ha! there is deviltry going on there!"

"Can those workmen have attacked Vere for his money?"

"I will stand in here and land so as to make time," and Don Moro ordered his helmsman to stand inshore.

He was about to let go the anchor and lower away a boat, when he saw flashes up the coast a mile away, and these revealed the sloop at anchor.

Instantly the yacht headed for her, and with a result already known to the reader.

CHAPTER LVI.

UNDER THE GIANT OAK.

THE Don reached the shore to find there none other than Shannon Vere and his victorious party.

The young planter had seen the sinking of the boat near the sloop, saw the latter stand away

up the bay, and was about to return to the mansion, when the yacht was sighted in chase.

He recognized her at once, and so remained to watch the chase.

"It is the Shark, Don Juan Moro's yacht, and she can catch the wind," he said to those with him.

He had recognized Shaw Shriver in the lead of the party, and in spite of their disguises, knew just who they were.

He understood well the motive of their coming, to rob and kill him, thus getting revenge for his treatment of the bully, Shriver.

Seeing that the yacht was putting back with the sloop following in her wake, he waited, and soon after met the Don on the beach as he sprung ashore from his boat.

"Well, Vere, what does it all mean?" asked the Don.

"Oh, only that my old associates do not like to see me go up and they stay down."

"I slighted Shaw Shriver and had to knock him down, so he took Ned Ross and the gang on the Sea Raven and came to pay me a visit.

"They were somewhat rude, for they broke the door in with a sill intended to repair the piazza, and evidently believed me alone with Buck and old Phoebe.

"I woke the boys, we opened fire, and there are two or three dead and as many wounded back at the mansion, while I think others were wounded, and surely some one was drowned when the boat sunk."

"You have the balance, Don; but how was it you appeared so opportunely upon the scene?"

"I will tell you as we go on, for we will return to the Hall and you go back with me in my yacht, for I shall deliver up the jail-birds to the keeper of the town jail to-night."

The Don then ordered his boat's crew of six negroes to follow, and the party started for the mansion.

Old Buck's eyes looked like stars they were so bright with excitement; Phoebe was on hand trying to:

"Help dem wicked wounded men," she said, and the rest of the negroes stood about in awe.

Some of the workmen had charge of the dead and wounded, and it was a relief to all when the master and his party returned.

"You had better have the horses hitched to a wagon and sent down with the dead and wounded, to be put on the sloop, and I will turn her over with all on board to the village officers," said the Don.

This advice was at once followed, and then telling Buck and Phoebe to take charge of the mansion, and the foreman of the workmen to take things easy in the morning with his men until his return, Shannon Vere returned to the yacht with the Don.

The dead and wounded were already on board the sloop, and, with the yacht, set sail for the village.

The wind held fresh and they made a good run, the Shark arriving far ahead; but this the Don was anxious to do, as he had time to send ashore and call up the officers of the law.

Vere told his story, and said that he would return during the day with his witnesses of the midnight attack, and he left a note to be given Judge Vose, asking him to see to his case.

The Don told his story, and said he would return with Shannon Vere in due time, and also bring the witnesses.

Then the yacht set sail for Castle Moro.

It was nearing dawn when she dropped anchor, and the steward of the vessel having given them a cup of coffee and some toast they went ashore.

Sable let them in and was told to get certain dueling pistols and to prepare to go with his master.

"Now, Vere, as I told you, Grayhurst would hear to nothing and so you must fight, and wishing the matter over I decided on this morning.

"I am sorry you have had such a broken night of it for it was enough to unsteady even a man of my iron nerve."

"My nerves are all right, Don, and I will be glad to have the thing over with."

"Well, I believe you are all right."

"As dead a shot as you are, you should know just where to send your bullet to reach the heart."

"Why not the head?"

"Oh well it makes an ugly wound for those a man loves to see."

"That is true; I will fire for the heart, sir."

"Remember, he is no bad shot, and I think he has been practicing."

"He may kill me; but he will have to be very quick about it."

"Well, now let us be off," and the two left the mansion and walked down to the boat.

They found the boat waiting, sprung in, Sable followed and the oarsmen rowed rapidly out of the cove and along the shore in the early morning.

They saw a boat approaching, in which were two negro oarsmen and two white men in the stern.

One was Gaston Grayhurst, the other was the neighborhood physician, Doctor Spotswood.

The boats landed on the beach not far apart

and the parties saluted and moved up the slope to an immense live-oak tree.

Sable followed with the boxes, and one of the Grayhurst oarsmen did like duty with the weapons of his master.

"A sad affair this, Don Moro, a very sad affair; but I am told you did all in your power to prevent it," said Doctor Dillon Spotswood the surgeon.

"I did all, sir, even pressed too hard; but it was useless."

"He is not worthy to fight Grayhurst, and—"

"Doctor Spotswood, you forget I am serving Mr. Vere as well as Mr. Grayhurst."

"I beg pardon, I did forget, and I hope this duel may be a bloodless one, to give the young man a chance to show if his reformation, which I hear of, is sincere; but both Mr. Grayhurst and myself lay this reform of Vere to your kind heart, Don, you hoping to save him from utter ruin."

"I try to be just to all, Doctor Spotswood," replied the Don with a look of innocence upon his dark, bearded face.

Then he said in a louder voice:

"Gentlemen, the terms of this duel are—weapons, pistols; distance ten paces; to fire between the words *Fire* and *Three*.

"If first shot is not effective, I shall demand, as second to you both, that there shall be no other fire."

The Don bowed and then stepped off the distance carefully, drove two pegs in the ground, and placed them so that the rising sun should give neither an advantage; then he stepped forward with the pistols, four in all, and offered the first choice to Gaston Grayhurst, who took one of his own.

Shannon Vere selected one of the Don's, and the other two were given to Sable to return to their cases.

The Don now took from the two men their pistols, and stepping aside to where Sable had all in readiness, said:

"Doctor, pray see me load the pistols."

"Oh no, my dear Don, for there is not the slightest need."

"No indeed," added Grayhurst.

The Don bowed and turned away, and none saw the diabolical look that flashed over his face.

Had the doctor overlooked his loading, he would not have found it so easy a matter to leave a bullet out of one pistol; but the cunning man was prepared even for this, for he took from his pocket what appeared to be a bullet, but it was one cleverly made to be harmless, and with a sly glance at it replaced it in his waistcoat.

Then the Don loaded the pistols carefully with powder, and one with bullet, and stepped forward to hand them to the respective principals, whom he placed in position.

The sad face of Gaston Grayhurst was perfectly calm, and that of his younger adversary wore the reckless look habitual to him.

To his credit at least be it said, he did not know the trickery that the Don was practicing.

Then the Don's voice rung out, as it had on many a quarter-deck in action:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?

"Fire!"

But one pistol flashed.

The quickness which Shannon Vere had shown in the shooting-gallery in Castle Moro was repeated. He killed the planter before the latter's pistol was at a level!

"I am sorry, very sorry," he said and turned away from the spot as the doctor caught Grayhurst in his arms.

"He is dead?" whispered the Don.

"Alas, yes! shot through the heart."

The Don took the pistol that had fallen from his hand.

"This is his weapon; it is best to fire it off and not take it home loaded."

"Yes," assented Doctor Spotswood.

The Don fired the pistol, thus hiding his guilt from all eyes, were suspicion to fall upon him.

CHAPTER LVII.

AFTER THE DUEL.

THE dwellers in the village, and along the shores, awoke the next morning, to find themselves not only amazed but shocked.

The past night had brought forth wonders.

They had gone to rest excited over the fact that Shannon Vere had inherited an enormous fortune, had utterly reformed, paid all his debts and was going to make Shannon Hall the grandest spot on the shores of the Gulf, according to rumor.

They awoke to discover that because he "cut" his old associates dead, and knocked Shaw Shriver down, those men, one time his boon companions, had gone on the sloop Sea Raven by night to murder and rob him, but had been beaten off by the young planter and his workmen in splendid style, and lost several of their number.

Then Don Juan Moro had been cruising in his yacht, heard the firing, chased the sloop, and captured all.

Next came the startling tidings that at sunrise a duel had been fought between Gaston

Grayhurst, of Belle Eden, and Shannon Vere, the former being the challenger, the Don and Dr. Dillon Spotswood the seconds, in which the noble planter had fallen dead by the hand of the young master of Shannon Hall.

But for the fact that Shannon Vere had just inherited a vast fortune, as rumor had it, and had reformed, it certainly would have gone hard with the young man.

Knowing that the Don and Vere were to be at the preliminary trial of the midnight raiders, the country-folk flocked to the village to see the young planter, who had suddenly become a man of importance.

The Don, realizing that they must be at the trial, had said after the duel:

"Vere, return to my home, get breakfast and then sail in the yacht for your home and take all on board who will be called as witnesses today."

"I will accompany the body home, and try and soothe the grief of little Estelle and her mother."

"My God! I had not thought of them."

"I would that my act was undone."

"What is, is, so do not let feeling unman you, for there is another ordeal to pass through."

"Go, now."

"Where will you join me?"

"I will come off from Belle Eden in a boat and you can pick me up, for I shall watch for your return."

The young man turned away and the Don joined the doctor, who was sadly following the negro oarsmen as they bore the body to the boat.

There in the doorway as they came, stood the mother, grasping Estelle by the hand.

Her husband had told her all, and she bore bravely up under it.

She had gotten the bed ready to receive him, with bandages and all necessary articles should he be wounded.

She had hoped against hope, and she saw by the cloak thrown over him that he was dead.

Her face became livid, and she would have fallen but for the Don's arm catching her.

He bore her to a sofa, called an old negress and her maid, and left her to the doctor's care, while he took little Estelle out upon the piazza and soothed her grief as best he could.

Thus an hour passed, and the doctor came out.

"She is a brave woman and will bear up under it, for her child's sake," he said.

The Don waited until he saw the yacht returning, and then, as neighbors began to arrive, sympathetic lady friends, he went out in a boat, rowed by a Belle Eden crew, and boarded his yacht.

"You have your men, Vere?"

"Yes; but did it kill her?" he asked, eagerly.

"No, she stands it like the brave woman she is."

"And Estelle?"

"Is as brave as her mother."

"The child comes of a brave stock; but now for that trial, and let me tell you that the news has already spread over the country of this duel, and by the time we reach the village you will have to face a large crowd, perhaps an angry one; but I am your friend, and I have no fear of your faltering, for you were as cool as when shooting in my gallery."

"You have a wonderful nerve, Vere, and your wild career has neither shattered your pluck or your health."

"Thank you, Don," was all the reply Shannon Vere made.

Arriving off the village they landed, and the Don had armed the workmen and the dozen of his crew whom he had accompany him, telling them to keep their weapons out of sight.

"These men may have friends who will attack: but if so obey me," he had said.

The crew left on the yacht had their orders also, to stand near the guns to protect a retreat to the Shark if rendered necessary.

The crowd gazed on in silence as they advanced, every eye upon Shannon Vere who stood the gaze unflinchingly.

The prisoners were then in court, ranged for trial, the dead bodies of the raiders, and one of the workmen, afterward discovered to have been killed, also, and the trial was before the justice of the peace, Judge Vose, and a coroner.

In a manly way, with every eye upon him, all knowing that he had, a few hours before sent a bullet through the heart of Gaston Grayhurst, Vere told his story.

He followed the advice of the Don and began by telling how he had determined to reform his evil life, and had at once been rewarded for his good intentions by a large legacy unexpectedly received.

He did not seek to hide his life; he said it had been too accursed, too well known to hide, but that because he cut the men whom, as a companion he knew to be bad, they had sought to kill and rob him.

This Ned Ross, who sought to save himself and his sloop, also swore to, and the workmen testified as to the attack and repulse.

The Don gave his testimony, and the men, unharmed and wounded, were held, except Ned Ross who had offered himself as State's evidence.

As one of the workmen had been killed, all were held for having committed murder or been accessories thereto.

Back to his home went Shannon Vere and his workmen, and he determined to make an exile of himself for a long while to come, never going anywhere, except in his lugger to New Orleans when necessary, and visiting the Don only by night.

And in his grave Gaston Grayhurst was laid to rest, while the beautiful widow clung weeping to the arm of the man she deemed a true friend, and he, looking down upon the coffin, hearing the earth fall upon it, never changed a muscle of his face.

But with what feelings he went back to his magnificent home who can tell?

CHAPTER LVIII.

CONCLUSION.

A YEAR and more has passed since the death of the master of Belle Eden at the hands of Shannon Vere, and the sad face of the beautiful widow has not lost a line of its beauty.

She is living for her daughter Estelle alone.

Shannon Hall was fitted up in grand style by the heir who once wrecked its fortunes, and it became an object of admiration to all.

One by one, seeing that his reformation was sincere, the planters called upon the young planter, but though glad to have them do so, he did not return their calls, and continued his lonely life, visiting only the Don, and seldom ever going to the village.

The raiders had been tried and sentenced to imprisonment for a long term of years, so that rid the country of a wicked lot of sinners.

Belle Eden was kept up as usual by Mrs. Grayhurst, and rumor had it that some day she would marry Don Juan Moro, for he was most attentive to her.

The Don himself lived as usual, and seemed to enjoy life each year to a greater extent.

Thus matters stood along the coast, when as Don Juan was seated in his library one night, he was startled by seeing Sable dart into the room.

The negro was panting as from a run, and his eyes looked like saucers.

"What ails you?" sternly shouted the Don.

"Massa, 'fore de Lor', sah, de Sea Shell am back ag'in, and Massa Bestor on her along wid de little boy o' Missis Grayhurst, sah!"

The Don never came so near fainting in his life as then.

He grasped the negro and cried:

"Fool! Black devil! what do you mean by such lies?"

"'Fore de goo' Lor' it am true, massa, I seen him all."

"Tell me what you saw and quick!"

"I war courtin' Nancy, Missis Grayhurst's maid, sah, and we seen de yacht come in, drop anchor and a boat come ashore.

"I thoughted you had come over, and I waited for Nancy until she see what her mistis rung de bell for.

"I creped up to de gallery, sah, and I seen dat same gemman as sailed wid you on de Sea Shell and were lost overboard.

"He hab with him a young lad in sailor suit, and it were Mars' Gordon Grayhurst sure, only some years older.

"Den Cap'n Bestor say:

"Madam Grayhurst, I have brought your son back from the coast of Africa, whar I went for him in de Sea Shell, which I borror one night from Don Juan Moro.

"Den, massa, Mistis Grayhurst weep and cry and lub her son, and Nancy she come out an' call to me she can't stay no longer, and so I come home in my skiff, sah, for I was skeert at seein' Massa Bestor, a dead man come ter life."

"Silence!" yelled the Don, and then he said, calmly:

"Where is my mail, sir?"

"It am here, sah; but you said I c'u'd stop on de way back and see Nancy, and gib you de mail in de morning."

The Don's voice was soft and low as he said:

"That is all right, Sable; I do not blame you; but say nothing of this, yet."

"No, sah."

The Don never opened his mail, but paced the room.

Then he called Sable and said:

"A letter here calls me at once away, for months. You go with me, so get your things on board the Shark, which have ready at once. I will pack a box here to take, and you look to my room while I write letters I wish to leave."

Two hours after, the Shark glided out of the cove, and ran swiftly toward the Gulf.

The next day Mrs. Grayhurst received a letter from the Don, saying that he had been unexpectedly called to Spain to be gone an indefinite time, so left farewell for herself and dear Estelle.

They were at breakfast when the letter came, and after reading it, she said:

"I regret that you could not see the Don, Captain Bestor, your old friend, and you too, my son."

Sable had seen and heard the truth—the Sea Shell had returned.

Frank Bestor had arranged with the trader,

when in Africa, to make the attack when Gordon was taken, and it had been a bogus affair.

He had been carried off to be allowed to escape in some slaver visiting the coast afterward.

After his rescue of Carter Weston from the gallows, he had sailed for the coast of Africa in the Sea Shell to find the boy.

A long while he sought, but at last was successful and returned him to his home.

As for himself he explained his escape, said nothing of the Don's treachery, but being picked up by the Sea Shell, had run her north to save a friend from the gallows, and learning of a white boy a captive in Africa had gone to rescue him.

He did not give the Don away as Pierre the Pirate and Monsieur Belgarde; not even to Gordon did he tell that the pirate was known as Don Moro near his home, and they agreed to say nothing of Bestor's ever having served on a buccaneer craft.

To the Don he meant to tell the truth and warn him no longer to sail under false colors.

With this explanation I can only say that Bestor sailed northward in the Sea Shell soon after, leaving Gordon at his home, and there was no doubt but that it was to again see Miriam whom he loved more than ever.

As for Don Moro, he certainly did not go back to piracy, and when long months went by and he did not return, it was believed by all that his beautiful vessel had gone down in a terrific tornado that swept the Gulf from shore to shore a day after his departure.

Gordon Grayhurst's adventures and trials did not end then for his after life became a romance even stranger than that which is here narrated and which caused men to regard him as one not born to be killed by man or the elements.

These adventures, however, belong not to this record, but to another, which the reader of this series may, sometime, have placed in his hands.

It only remains to state that, as the reader probably has surmised, Don Moro was, in truth, the young brother of Gaston Grayhurst, who, early in life, had run off to sea; and who, ascertaining who it was that stood between him and the Grayhurst titles and estates, had followed up his elder brother with such malignancy as very nearly wrought the ruin which his diabolical plots contemplated.

THE END.

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